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THE
DEATH'S-HEAD RANGERS

A TALE OF THE LONE STAR STATE.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 381. GRIZZLY-HUNTERS. | 389. JAQUAR QUEEN. |
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NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

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A TALE OF THE FIVE STAR STATE.
Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1874, by
BEADLE AND ADAMS,
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NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
22 NASSAU STREET.

THE

DEATH'S-HEAD RANGERS

CHAPTER I.

TRAINING-DAY.

THIRTY-FIVE years ago, America was a very different place from what it has since become, thanks to steam and electricity. In those days, railroads were few and far between, communication slow and difficult; and, as a consequence, there were marked differences in the people of different sections of the country—differences in speech, manners and habits, known under the general name of "provincialisms."

In no part of the country were these provincialisms more marked than in the densely-wooded States of Kentucky and Tennessee. In those remote regions, each class of society was as easily recognized by its dress and speech as in Europe—from the lordly planter, with his hundreds of field-hands, to the long-legged, shambling hunter, in hunting-shirt, leggings and moccasins, pack on back.

Now, thanks to the march of civilization, we are all sinking to a dead level of character, and the woods and hunters have almost disappeared, save among the Alleghany ridges and on the limitless prairies.

Not so was it in the days when our story opens, when Kentucky was in her prime, and when the Lone Star of Texas was just risen over the horizon. In the wild, free life of those days there has always been to me an imperishable charm, and if I can reproduce it in these pages, I am satisfied.

"Naow, gentlemen, *do* be reasonable," expostulated the

“Colonel.” “Haow is it possible to make that ’ere line as it should be, ef you won’t git your eyes slewed towards me? *Right—DRESS!* Naow, Mr. Harrod, *don’t* you know yer right hand from yer left?”

“Course I do—I ain’t no durned fool,” exclaims the individual addressed. “I’ve been a right dressin’ all the arternoon. Seems to me, it’s time we did suthin’ else, naow.”

“Good! good! Let’s fix baggonets!” cried a long-legged unter, in a green frock. “That’s what I like.”

From the murmurs of applause that greeted the proposal, it was evident that the Lexington Guards were in favor of adopting it.

Colonel Biggs elevated his hands in despair, crying:

“Naow, gentlemen, haow *are* ye to fix baggonets when the line ain’t dressed? And the half of yer hain’t got no baggonets, nuther. I declar’, I never seen sich an onreasonable craowd in my life. We’ll du all that in good time. Jest naow I want yer to right dress.”

“Well, boys, let’s du it, to please cunnel,” said Harrod, grinning. “Git yer heads askew, all of yer. Sam Jackson, ye durned old lunkhead, stick in that ’ere nose o’ your’n. I can’t see cunnel fur it.”

This sally provoked an indignant retort from Mr. Jackson on the subject of Harrod’s boots being number nineteens, and, amid a great deal of bantering, the bow-shaped line finally assumed a resemblance to straightness, when the colonel announced:

“Thar, gentlemen, that’ll do. I’ve be’n to *Saint* Looey, and seen reg’lars a-drillin’, and I must say that ’ere line beats any thing I seen thar.”

Colonel Biggs, though not a first-class tactician, was evidently an old demagogue, and understood his men, for his remarks produced an immediate silence, while a smile of proud satisfaction shone from every face, as its owner tried to make his back as much of an inward arch as was possible to men with old habits of stooping, whether over plow or under greenwood branches.

The scene in that old training-ground was in many respects quite peculiar and interesting. From the remarks of the men and officers, it might be inferred that the whole business

was a farce, but anyone who took a second look at the appearance of the men would have pronounced them decidedly "ugly customers" in a fight, however impatient of discipline.

It was "general training-day" all over Kentucky, and in those times, the day was the signal for a universal spree, to be sure. But the men it brought together formed such a material for soldiers as has never been excelled elsewhere, and, wild and rough as they were, every man was a keen hunter, bold horseman and good shot.

The city of Lexington, in those days, was not as large as now, and the forests and fields stretched up very close to its margin. Not a mile from the city, on old Briggs' plantation, where the training ground lay, you might have fancied yourself still in the backwoods.

The training-ground was a large green at the cross-roads, and a tavern, with a flaming portrait of Daniel Boone scalping an Indian, stood at one side. On the green, and struggling through the rudiments of company drill, were four companies of stalwart hunters, all tall, big-boned fellows, with a loose, shambling look about them, with very keen eyes, and a habit of contracting their heavy brows to see better; with shaggy hair and beard, the upper lip very often shaven, for convenience of eating and drinking.

The companies were strong in numbers, averaging eighty men each, and boasted very high-sounding appellations—the "Lexington Guards," the "Boone Invincibles," "Patriot Fencibles," and "Lexington Rangers." Their uniforms were of one kind, differing only in color. The hunting-shirt, with its gayly-fringed cape and skirt, and the old Indian leggings of fringed deer-skin, were universal; while the 'coon-skin cap, with the barred tail for plume, was the prevalent head-dress. Two companies wore green frocks, one white, the fourth brown, and one covered the heads of its members with broad felt hats instead of fur caps. All the men carried rifles of the old Kentucky pattern, small-bored and accurate, and all wore huge knives in their belts. As Colonel Biggs had remarked, not half of them had bayonets, and the operation of fixing these was impossible to most of those owning them, on account of the shape of the rifle.

Such as they were, the companies boasted of two colonels, one major, a judge, and five captains, for their officers, and a Brigadier-General with a numerous staff of colonels, was in attendance at the "hotel." Said hotel was kept by Colonel Biggs, and training-day always brought him in unlimited dimes and half-dimes, for an equivalent of "old rye." To this fact is attributable much of his patience with his unruly command.

All round the green, backwoodsmen and planters were lounging, some on foot, some on horseback; and the flutter of riding-habits and plumes, with the more homely sun-bonnets of farmers' wives and daughters, showed that the fair sex was, as ever, on hand at the field of Mars.

The drill went blundering along, full of good-humor and rustic wit, for nearly an hour, when the rolling of drums from the door of "Biggs's" brought it to a sudden termination.

Instantly there was a clapping of hands and yelling all over the green, and the companies dissolved into chaos, while the spectators overflowed the late training-ground, and mingled freely with the warriors.

Colonel Biggs sheathed his trenchant blade, and started for the bar-room, unbuckling his sword-belt as he went. For him, the labors of the day were just beginning, comparatively speaking.

Five minutes later, the same Biggs, who had been so nervously anxious on the subject of drill, was standing, jovial and hearty, behind his shining bar, mixing drinks with the hand of a master, while his sweating assistants, at their wit's ends in the confusion, were endeavoring to satisfy the thirsty and clamorous crowd of warriors.

"Hyar's to you, cunnel," cried Bill Yancey, the "Bully of Kentucky" as he called himself. "Hyar's every ha'r off the old cat's tail, and may we all be hyar, next trainin'-day."

"Hyar's luck," says Harrod, more briefly, as he elevated the bottom of his glass to the ceiling, setting it down with a clash on the bar.

For several minutes the succession of applicants at the bar was steady and unceasing; and then, as the first crowd gave

way to their unsatisfied comrades, the buzz of conversation grew loud in the room.

The subject was easily ascertained; for the many references to targets, rifles, and the names of noted shots, proclaimed that the forthcoming event of the day was to be a shooting-match.

"I'll bet on old Thunderer," cried Bill Yancey, patting his heavy rifle affectionately. "I kin shoot the ha'r off any nan in this crowd."

"Whar's the documents?" suddenly demanded a shrill, squeaky voice from the crowd, in the momentary hush that followed Yancey's boast. "I'll bet yer, stranger."

Bill Yancey was an enormous fellow, standing several inches above the traditional six feet, in his moccasins. As the voice came from behind him, he turned to look over the crowd, and saw no one, at first, to whom such a voice could be supposed to belong.

"Who's talking?" he demanded, in a tone of contempt. "Let me see the man that wants to shoot ag'in' Bill Yancey, the bully of Kentuck."

"Hyar I be, stranger," answered the same squeaky voice. "I'll bet any man in this craowd ten dollars, I kin put six balls aout of seven in the same ho-el, and hyar's the documents."

There was a parting movement in the crowd, as the woodman turned to see the author of this challenge, and Yancey beheld a little dried-up man, in a very dirty hunting-shirt that had once been green, wearing a mangy fur cap above a pair of twinkling black eyes, set in a nest of wrinkles amid a yellow, parchment-like face. This man was hardly five feet in hight, and thin and wiry in build. His face was perfectly hairless, and his head was closely cropped. Altogether, he was a mean-looking little man, insignificant to a degree, whose only redeeming point was a look of sly humor on his wizen face. Standing close to the gigantic for-ester, hugging a rifle longer than himself, he extended a bunch of dirty dollar bills and repeated:

"I'll bet any man in this craowd ten dollars, I kin put six balls aout of seven, in the same ho-el, every time."

CHAPTER II.

THE SHOOTING-MATCH.

"Oh, git aout!" said Yancey, contemptuously. "D'yer want me to tote yer daown to the river and draown yer, yer ornary little chipmunk. Why, you mout be shoved into a common bullet ho-el yerself, ef they sot yer in, eend-ways."

The little man's only reply was a variation of his old refrain, delivered in the same squeaky voice:

"Bet yer ten dollars, stranger, I kin put six bullets aout of seven in the same ho-el, and *hyar's the dockyments*."

This third repetition of the challenge elicited a round of applause from the Kentuckians, who saw fun ahead, and Harrod shouted:

"Take him up, Bill. You've be'n blowin' 'round hyar 'bout your shootin', long 'nuff. Down with the dust, or back aout."

Yancey grew red in the face.

"Back daown Bill Yancey, the bully of Kentuck! Not fur all the shinplasters in Lexington Bank. Hyar, chipmunk, hyar's my pile, and I'll raise yer ten dollars. Bet yer twenty yer can't do it. No man *kin* put six bullets in the same ho-el, fa'r and squar'."

The little man dove into a pouch by his side, and produced three five dollar bills, dirtier than the first bunch, and ragged too.

"I see yer, and raise yer five," he said, quietly.

Yancey hesitated a moment. Twenty five dollars was a large sum out West, in those days. At last, he said:

"I'll see yer, ef it takes my bottom dollar. I hain't got but twenty-three, but I'll put up my rifle fur the rest, darn me ef I don't."

"'Tain't necessary, stranger," said the little man, quietly. "I'll trust yer ef ye *air* a blower. Who'll hold the stakes?"

"Give 'em to cunnel," suggested Harrod, as they stood by the bar. "Thar won't be any whisky drunk raound hyar,

'till this hyar bet's settled, and cunnel's a good jedge of shoot-in' "

"Hold on," said Yancey, suddenly, and turning red. "Mebbe this hyar's a skin game, gentlemen. How far are yer to shute?"

He addressed the little man, who drew himself up proudly.

"I won't deny, stranger," he said, dryly, "I *mout* skin yer f I wanted, by droppin' the bullets daown a well, fur I didn't specify no kind of a ho-el. Moun't I, gentlemen?"

There was an awkward silence, and Yancey began to look very silly. His antagonist evidently had him in a trap, if he chose, for it was obvious that any man could put six balls into the same hole without shooting one of them. A smothered titter began among the Kentuckians, which was suppressed when the "Bully of Kentuck" glared fiercely round, for Bill Yancey was dreaded by all. But the little man quietly continued his remarks.

"I ain't on the skin game, myself, stranger. Jake Rhett kin make ten dollars, fa'r, any day, without any skin games. I'll shoot six balls into any tree you've a mind to name and make only one ho-el. Is that fair?"

"Fair enough!" "Good!" "Let's see it."

The crowd was growing impatient.

"And as fur distance, why, a hundred paces, in course, *reg'lar*."

The satisfaction was general. Even Bill Yancey gave in, saying:

"Wal, stranger, ef ye kin du that, ye kin take my pile, and I'll knock under. I kin shoot, but I kain't beat that."

"Take the stakes, cunnel," said the little man, laconically, as he handed the bills over the bar to the hotel-keeper "I'm ready."

Bill Yancey handed over his own money, and then followed his little antagonist out of the room, in the midst of the crowd.

Outside, the green was full of people, and the news of the bet, and the wonderful shooting in prospect spread like wild-fire. The richer planters and citizens, with their wives and daughters, were taking lunch in the various vehicles grouped at the edge of the green, but as the news spread, there was a

general desertion of eating, while horsemen and Amazons alike congregated on the end of the green where the match was to take place.

"Do you think he can do it, Charley?" whispered a pretty little lady, with brown curls, merry brown eyes, and a saucy little turn-up nose, as she looked up at a tall handsome young fellow beside her, whose long hair and mustache and haughty aquiline features were marks of his aristocratic Southern blood.

"I don't see why he shouldn't," said the young man, absently stroking the mane of his blood-horse. "After all, straight shooting, with a good rifle, is an affair of coolness and steady hand. A machine could put fifty balls into one hole as well as six."

"*You* couldn't do it, sir," said the young lady, pertly.

He smiled without a trace of pique.

"Thanks, Ella. I am not a machine. When this gentle man gets through I may try a few shots. You know the rifle's not my forte."

"Nor any thing else, except 'spooning'," she answered, with a lightning repartee, then, as if anxious to atone for what she had said, whispered, "Don't get mad, Charley. I didn't mean it."

The young man's eye had given a single flash at the first cut, but he remained calm as he said:

"I shall not have long to 'spoon,' Ella. This is my last day."

Then the girl's countenance fell, in its turn, and she slipped one little hand out, and slyly squeezed his as their horses stood side by side in the crowd. Clearly, there was something between these young people.

But now the shooting-match was about to begin.

Bill Yancey, after all his boasts, was not the man to back out from a contest he had invited. He stood out, rifle in hand, till the distance had been paced to a large tree, whose scarred trunk seemed to have been the victim of many former matches.

Around a spot on this tree, where the nail was usually driven, was a large circle, like a piece of sponge, so full was it of bullet-holes.

A moment later, a round board was hung up against this tree, in the center of which a spike nail was driven, half-way to the head.

The spectators gathered in two groups, one about the marksmen, the other a few paces to the left of the target. In those parts the shooting was too close to render this a risky proceeding.

Jake Rhett, as the little man had announced himself, stood leaning on his rifle in silence, watching Yancey.

The big hunter threw back his right foot, slowly raised his rifle to a level, and fired. The clap of the bullet on the head of the nail was distinctly heard at the firing point, and a shout came from the target.

"Driven home! Good shot!"

"Thar, chipmunk, kin ye beat that?" said Yancey, proudly.

The little man shifted the foot he was resting on.

"Kin ye put six balls out of seven in the same hoel?" he asked, in the same squeaky voice as ever.

Yancey turned angrily away, saying:

"No, nor you, nuther."

"Why, ye ain't *thr'u'*?" asked Jake Rhett, in his quavering whine. "I thought you was goin' to shute at least three balls, fur the honor of old Kentuck."

"Whar do *you* come from?" growled Yancey, in answer.

"Way down in ole Tennessee," said the little man, placidly. "Hev ye finished, stranger?"

"Yes. I've druv the nail fa'r and squar'," said the hunter, doggedly. "You beat it, ef ye kin."

The little man turned on his heel and marched to a bench close by. On the bench lay a bundle, done up in an old ragged red-cotton handkerchief. So dirty was its external appearance that no one had touched it, and its smell was decidedly strong. This bundle the eccentric hunter opened, and disclosed three onions, two small hoecakes, a little paper parcel, and a number of loose bullets, with some round patches of deer-skin. With as much care as if the contents of the bundle had been diamonds, Jake Rhett extracted the little paper package therefrom, opened it, and discovered it full of very fine gunpowder. Amid a hush of amused curiosity, the old

fellow put a bullet on the palm of his left hand, and poured just sufficient powder to hide it from view.

Then he poured the powder from this primitive measure into the muzzle of his long rifle, and put the bullet in his mouth. Drawing the rammer and selecting a patch, he wrapped up the wet bullet, and rammed it home, patch and all, with a few vigorous shoves.

Extracting a cap from a case in the stock of the rifle, he turned round.

"Naow, stranger," he said, "I'm going to put these six bullets into one hoel, on top of yourn, jest as I said, or you kin take my pile."

Then the little man took five more bullets out of the bun-āie, and tied up the handkerchief again, leaving only the powder outside.

"Why don't you take another bullet?" asked Colonel Biggs, who had been watching him with great interest. "The bet allows seven."

The little man wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

"I reckon six air 'nuff," was all he said.

Then he slowly raised to a level the rifle, which was longer than himself, paused an instant, steady as a rock, and fired.

The clap of the bullet on the nail was heard, and a shout came from beyond:

"Druv through the board. Made a hole."

Without a word the little man took from his mouth a second bullet, put it on his hand, and reloaded with great rapidity.

The second shot made a dull thud.

The third, fourth, fifth and sixth were inaudible.

At the sixth shot, a clapping of hands came from the target, and a cheer spread from one side of the green to the other. The stakeholder marched up to the target, followed by an excited crowd, and discovered that the almost incredible feat had really been performed. The little man's first bullet had driven a hole through the board and into the tree; and the other bullets had piled themselves one on the other without touching the wood.*

* Lest the reader should accuse me of "drawing the long bow," I desire to state that the main incident of this feat, as well as those in the next

Jake Rhett pocketed the stakes, put his tongue in his cheek, and squeaked out :

" Bet any man in this crowd twenty-five dollars, I kin put ten balls aout of a dozen in the same hoel, and I've got the docky-ments."

CHAPTER III.

A NEW WAY TO KILL RATS.

THE sun was within an hour of setting, and the air was cool and pleasant, when the young gentleman who was called "Charley," together with his fair companion "Ella," cantered around the winding curve of a picturesque brown road in the woods and checked their horses in front of a long, low, rambling house, of a single story, which stretched away in an irregular pile for a considerable distance, bordered all down the front with a long veranda.

Close to the house and connected by a covered passage, was the low, rough stone kitchen, around whose doors dozens of black, brown and yellow children were tumbling about in play. Beyond that was the immense barn, and a mighty corn-crib, full to overflowing with yellow ears, and just at the entrance of the clearing in which the house stood, waved a huge elm tree, over the spring-house.

Behind the house was a broad stock-yard, now full of cows at milking time, and some dozen thoroughbred colts were trotting about by their sober dams, kicking up their heels occasionally in equine frolic.

Beyond this again stretched great brown stubble-fields, toward the setting sun, and the teams could be seen winding slowly home before their sable drivers. The stock-yard was full of chattering negresses, milking and talking, and the children seemed to pervade every yard of the old homestead.

Altogether, it was such a picture of peace and profusion as chapter, is simple fact, taken from the account of a gentleman of the strictest veracity, who was an eyewitness of the shooting. The three main personages of this little tale are portraits of people, one of whom is yet alive, to my knowledge, another very probably, while the third was killed with Walker in Nicaragua.

only the huge farms of the West can supply, and induced a wish in the observer that he might live there forever.

On the veranda, in the warm rays of the sun, sat several gentlemen and one or two ladies, talking, and the center of the group was a tall, heavy-built gentleman, with short iron-gray beard, whose mild blue eyes and set grave face gave him a somewhat heavy appearance. This gentleman sat in an old-fashioned rocking-chair, slowly swinging to and fro, and over his knees lay a long rifle.

Near him was a second gentleman, quite short and broad, with a square, resolute face, yellow mustache, slightly grizzled, and keen blue eyes. Despite the difference in size, the look on both faces was enough to declare the two men to be brothers, and brothers they were.

The tall brother was Captain Winfield, the planter, the short one, his brother William, the artist.

The quiet, delicate lady in the black silk, is Mrs. Winfield, the other, so much younger, with such a vivacious and pretty face, keen as a hawk's, is Miss Agatha York, who has a leaning toward woman's rights, knows as much as most men, and plays divinely on the piano, out in the backwoods.

The other gentlemen on the veranda are neutral in appearance, and will introduce themselves as expedient.

As the two equestrians rode into the front of the homestead, the vivacious Miss York jumped up and ran down the steps, crying :

"Ella Moreland, you're the most charming person I know to come and see me when I'm perishing of *ennui*. Mr. Charlton, are you ready for another fight on the woman question? Oh, I've just been reading a book that gives it to you men. Splendid, perfectly divine!"

Charley Charlton laughed, as he sprung from his horse and lifted off his fair companion, quoting the words :

"'I'll fight upon that theme
Until mine eyelids will no longer wag.'"

"I'm sorry you ladies have to resort to other people's brains for new arguments, Miss York."

Agatha York favored him with a parting shot, as she led her friend up the steps.

"I've known people trust to their own brains when they were not strong enough to lean on, and the result has been a break-down."

She gave a triumphant laugh, as she and Ella Moreland went up the steps, with arms intertwined, while Charlton resigned the horses to an ebony gentleman, who rode in after him, and seemed to be his groom.

The young man walked leisursly up the steps, switching his boot with his whip, and was greeted by the family, to whom he seemed an old friend.

"Why, captain," he said, smiling, to the elder Winfield, "wherefore so warlike? What means this instrument of death upon thy manly knee, in peaceful times, amidst these beauteous ladies?"

The planter allowed a grim smile to ripple his face at the other's banter. Then he quietly answered:

"I'm waiting for a rat."

"A what? A rat?" echoed Charlton, astonished.

"Yes," said Winfield, placidly. "The rascal's been stealing my corn, and one of the dogs chased him under the wood-pile, out yonder. If he comes out before dark, I'm going to fix him."

Charlton's black servant, Tom, was standing close by, beneath the veranda, holding the horses; and as Winfield spoke, the negro's eyes dilated to their utmost extent, and he stared in a bewildered way at the planter.

Charlton made no further remark on the subject. The old captain was known throughout that part of the country as the quickest and surest shot for many miles, and he spoke without any braggadocio, as if he meant what he said.

"Well, Charlton," said Will Winfield, the artist, "and when are you off for the wars?"

"To-morrow, if all goes well," said the young man, cheerfully. "My company's full, and they promise us all a farm, if we rub through. I don't deny that it will be pretty hard work, though."

Old Winfield looked round quickly.

"Are you going as captain?" he asked.

"I am, sir," said Charlton, modestly. "I know I'm pretty young for the place, but the boys elected me, and I suppose

I must serve. I only wish you were coming with us. I'd resign in your favor in a moment."

"Bah! I'm too old. Take Will, here," said Winfield, gruffly.

"I should think I had a word to say about that," cried Miss Agatha, at that moment. "I'm not going to have Will go on any such wild-goose chase down to that horrid Texas, indeed. It's well enough for you, Mr. Charlton, if Ella chooses to let you go, as food for powder; but Will's a very different person, I can assure you."

"Thank you for the reminder, mademoiselle," said Charlton, laughing. "I am well aware of my worthlessness."

"You're no such thing," said Will himself, speaking for the first time. "I believe I'll go anyhow, just for that speech, young lady. I want to see some mustangs, and model one, before I die."

"Well, you can go, for all I care," said Miss Agatha, lightly, changing her tack as suddenly as suited her impulsive nature; "only you needn't expect me to wait for you."

"Pooh, pooh, child; yes, you will," said the elder Winfield, in his abrupt, laconic manner. "The trip will do Will good, and you're a baby yet."

Miss York pouted. She was a regular spoiled child at eighteen, having been a ward of her uncle, the childless John Winfield, from her birth almost.

It had been settled, years ago, that she was to marry Will Winfield, who was fifteen years her senior, and she really loved and venerated him to the greatest degree; but her tongue ran away with her on all occasions. Luckily for both, Will, like all the Winfields, was gifted with a calm, phlegmatic disposition, that never allowed itself to be ruffled, and was destitute of nerves, to all appearance.

"Never mind, Aggy," he said, in his quiet, fatherly way. "We settled all this long ago. If John will go, so will I."

"But will John go?" asked Charlton, eagerly. "Oh, captain, if you only will, I shall feel that we must succeed."

"What do you say, old lady?" asked Winfield, of the placid lady knitting by his side.

"Do you want to go, John?" was her only answer.

"I think I'd like it for a few months," said John, simply.

"You see there are a great many of our boys going, old lady, and they need an old fellow to keep them out of mischief. Now, there's Charley—"

As he spoke, he suddenly pitched his rifle to his shoulder and fired; then laid it across his knee and continued:

"Charley Charlton, you know, as crazy as a loon. Yes, I'd like to go."

"Very well, John," she answered, placidly. "You know best. But come back before spring, because the hands want looking after in plow-time, you know."

"Very well, old lady, I'll come in time."

And so was settled, in a manner entirely devoid of sentiment, an affair which was to influence the future destinies of all the individuals interested, and a few moments later, Captain Winfield handed his rifle to a gray-bearded negro who came to take it, as naturally as if he was used to the duty.

"Clean her out well, Scip," he said, rising. "Ladies and gentlemen, shall we go in? I see Mammy Andromeda carrying in cakes for tea."

As the party strolled into the house, Black Tom eagerly addressed Scipio.

"You Scip, you 'blige me by holdin' dese hosses one minute. I wants to see what Marse Winfield fire at."

"Yah, yah, chile; only a rat. Dat ain't nuffin."

But Tom was already running to the woodpile, where he had noticed the dust of the bullet when Winfield fired. A moment later, he came back with eyes like saucers, holding in his hand, by its long tail, a rat, whose head had been cut half off by the passage of the bullet.

"Oh, glory!" ejaculated Tom; "I hear um say he fire at de rat, and, sho' 'nuff, he kill um dead. Golly, Scip, you eber see sich a t'ing in you life? Dar him lie, not two feet from de hole, jess as he run like a streak. I seen him run."

Scipio suspended the operation of cleaning out the bore of the rifle, to toss his head in a condescending manner, remarking:

"Sho', chile, dat's nuffin. Please God, when ole Marse Winfie'd git his rifle on a rat, dat am a gone rat. Yah, yah!"

CHAPTER IV

"DRINK OR FIGHT, STRANGER!"

ABOUT a week after the events we have noticed, the first class steamer "Belle of Louisiana" was foaming down the current of the broad and brownish Mississippi on her way to New Orleans, with a heavy deck-load of cotton and tobacco, gathered at the various landing-places, and a number of passengers.

Conspicuous among the last were the green hunting-shirts, fringed with scarlet, and the broad gray hats of the Kentucky rangers, bound "for Texas and a muss," as Mr. William Yancey observed to an inquiring stranger.

"Yer see this 'ere, stranger," he pursued, taking off his hat, and pointing to a small ivory ornament secured in front "That's a skull, and these 'ere things air bones acrost and underneathside of it. No man kin wear that 'ere in his hat, ef he kurn't drive the nail twic't out of three times, hand-run-nin', with a ball, and thar's jest a hundred of us fellers spilin fur a muss, to chew up them Greasers, when we git to Texas. Every man's got a raal Kintuck shootin'-iron, and one of Cunnel Colt's six shooters, besides his toothpick, and you kin bet thar's gwine to be the tallest kind of a muss, when we git thar."

The person he was addressing was a man somewhat above the medium hight, with a broad, sinewy frame; but the languid and effeminate look of a very handsome face gave him an appearance much below his actual size and weight. His hair was brown, and cut as close as a prize fighter's, while his side-whiskers, of a pale straw color, were immensely long, of the kind called "Piccadilly weepers" in later days. What with his white hat, plaid suit, comfortable heavy shoes, umbrella and opera-glass, there was no mistaking this person for any thing but an English tourist. When we add that he was equally unmistakably a gentleman, with all his affectation, we have concluded his portrait.

"Ah—I beg your pabdon—but would you be so kind as to tell me what you mean by a toothpick—ah—Mr.—? Weally, I—" he drawled.

Yancey grinned, as he drew from his belt a huge knife, about eighteen inches long, by three in breadth.

"Thar it be, stranger," he said, flourishing it in close proximity to the Englishman's nose. "That's the tool to work with, ef ye want to sicken a greaser. Jest stick that into his aller hide, and give a rip, and then turn it raound, like this—" imitating the action, with a demoniacal grimace, "and aout comes his innards, sure's shootin'."

"Ah—viewy good, I must say," drawled the Englishman, not at all put out of countenance by the vapping ranger. "Would you be so kind as to put away the thing, Mr.—ah—weally, I—"

"My name's Bill Yancey, the Bully of Kentuck," replied Mr. Yancey, affably returning his "toothpick," with a grin at the other's cool request. "What in thunder's yourn, stranger?"

"Ah—my name—weally, I—well, you may call me Mr Smith," said the Englishman, with slight hesitation.

Yancey, with all his vapor and bluster, was a shrewd fellow. He winked at the other and observed, in a low tone:

"That'll do for Texas, boss. Reckon they call yer suthin' else to hum, but 'tain't none of my business. We are rough, stranger, but we're gentlemen in old Kentuck. Hope you'll 'scuse me fur bein' too free."

"Ah—certainly, Mr.—ah—Yancey. I'm awaah that this is a gweat place for fwee speech—ah—but the countwy's glorious, splendid, ah—viewy fine indeed, I assuah you."

Bill Yancey brought down his left hand on his right with a loud smack, then extended to the Englishman the huge palm, bellowing:

"Put it thar, stranger, ef it weighs a ton. Darn my old grandmother's gray cat's left eye, ef you ain't the fust Britisher I ever met as c'u'd expreciate this hyar glorious country 'fourn! Put her thar, ole hoss."

Somewhat to Yancey's surprise, the languid stranger struck his hand into his own with a force that completely frustrated the giant's usual practical joke on all that were not old acquaintances of his. Instead of getting the Englishman's

and in a vice, he found his own bones bending under a pressure that nothing but his tough muscles prevented from becoming torture. Obviously his new friend was up to the squeezing trick.

Yancey bore the pain, which was undeniable, without wincing, but when the other let go his hand, he said, half wonderingly:

"Stranger, you air a hull team on the squeeze, you air. Thar ain't another man in Ameriky c'u'd ha' done that. Let's hev a smile."

"Ah—I weally beg your pahdon—but, would you be so good as to tell me what object there can be in that, Mr.—ah—Yancey?"

"Object!" ejaculated the ranger. "What in thunder should thur be, 'cept to wash the mud out of our throats? I'm jest sick with that or'nary Mississippi water."

"Ah, weally, but—ah—how will it help that if we only smile—ah—Mr. Yancey? Would you be so good as to explain—ah?"

"Oh, thunder!" cried the ranger, enlightened; "I see what yer drivin' at. Waal, come daown to the bar and take a drink. That's English, ain't it?"

"Ah, yes, quite so, I assuah you—vewy good of you, I'm snah; but I never drink any thing between meals, Mr.—ah Yancey. Only at dinnah, I assuah you, a glass of bittah beah, you know, or a little shewy."

Bill Yancey turned and surveyed the Englishman with a peculiar look from head to foot.

"See hyar, stranger," he said, slowly; "mebbe you hain't be'n in old Kintuck, yit?"

"Yaas, yaas, I assuah you. Vewy beautiful place. Vewy pwetty girls."

"Well, stranger, then you mout know the rule in ole Kentuck—hey?"

"Ah, no—would you be so good as to tell me to what you refer, ah?"

"Sartin, stranger. Bill Yancey ain't the man to put on another when he's a ignorant farrineer. The rule is—*drink or fight*."

"Ah, weally," said the Englishman, placidly, "that's a

vewy stwarge wule, Mr.—ah—Yancey. Would you be so good as to explain it?"

"Explain it! Thunder!" snorted Yancey. "I axed you to drink, and either you drink with me, or you hev got ter fight me. Ain't that plain English?"

"Ah, yes, vewy plain English, I assuah you, Mr.—ah—Yancey—but you can't surely be sewious. Why should I fight you?"

"Because you won't drink with me, darn my buttons" roared Yancey, thoroughly enraged at the coolness of the other.

"But I'm not thirsty, I assuah you, Mr. Yancey."

This simply reply caused Yancey to pause a moment. He shook his head with a doubtful air. After all, the voice of reason will make itself heard sometimes, even against absurd and tyrannical customs.

The Englishman continued to regard him with the same placid smile.

"Waal, stranger," he said, more quietly, "thar's reason in that, but rules air rules, and must be kerried aout. You kin smoke, ef yer don't feel like drinkin'."

"Ah, yes, Mr.—ah—Yancey; but I nevah smoke any thing I don't know, I assuah you. If you'll honah me by taking a cigah, I should infinitely pwefer it, I assuah you."

And as he spoke, the imperturbable Briton extracted a huge cigar-case from his pocket and offered it, smiling to Yancey.

The "Bully of Kentuck" hesitated a moment; then he waved back the proffered cigar with grim steadiness, saying:

"Stranger, you air deep, but not deep enough to fool Bill Yancey. I tell yer, that, uther ye've got to come daown and drink with me, or fight me hyar and now. That's talkin'."

Before answering, the Englishman quietly returned the cigar-case to his pocket. Then he faced Yancey with a face suddenly become quite grave.

"Mr. Yancey," he said, distinctly, in his low, rapid English tones, "would you be so good as to go to the devil?"

As he spoke the slow, drawling effeminate Englishman vanished, and in his stead Yancey beheld—a man!

For a moment the huge borderer staggered back in utter amazement at being so braved. Then he uttered a furious oath and drew his tremendous knife to rush on the stranger.

But in his first step he halted as suddenly as if struck by lightning, as the squeaky tones of Jake Rhett's voice came on his ear, in high, menacing accents:

"Surgint Yancey, drop that knife, or I spile ye. Quick, now!"

As meek as a lamb, the "Bully of Kentuck" dropped the knife, for he found the muzzle of a rifle within a few feet of his head, and he was too well aware of Jake's aim and determination to hesitate.

The whole scene had taken place on the forward part of the hurricane-deck, which at the time was occupied by but very few people, most of them men of the rangers. The loud voices of the latter part of the colloquy had roused most of the latter to attention, and they were lazily strolling toward the bows, in expectation of a little excitement.

Jake Rhett no sooner saw Yancey drop his knife than he lowered his rifle, remarking:

"Bill Yancey, yer ought to know better than to pull on an unarmed man. Ef Cap knowed it, I reckon he'd histe ye overboard to feed the 'gators, sure's shootin' What's the muss, naow?"

"'Tain't my fault, orderly," said Yancey, gruffly. "We all know it's the rule in ole Kentuck, 'drink or fight,' and this hyar consarned old Britisher thinks himself too good to drink with me. Ain't I got a right to cut his liver aout, ef I kin? Say, naow?"

It was observable that Jake Rhett wore on his sleeve the carlet lozenge and chevrons of orderly sergeant, as Yancey did the bars of sergeant, and the fact explained somewhat the authoritative tone adopted by the former.

The little orderly sergeant turned round to the Englishman, who remained impassive and cool as ever, but wearing a new look of determination on his face, and said:

"Haow's this, stranger? The rule air so, sure 'nuff. Ef you won't drink with Surgint Yancey, ye've got to fight him."

CHAPTER V.

RIVER LIFE.

"Vewy well, sergeant," said Mr. Smith, coolly; "if you'll be so good as to see fair play, I shall be very much obliged I assuah you. I shall be very happy to fight Mr.—ah—Yancey."

"'Nuff said," replied Jake. "Gentlemen, make a ring Surgint, yer must give up all your weepins. This man ain't armed."

"'Twon't take long to chaw *him* up," said Yancey, contemptuously, as he threw off his accouterments and shirt. "Bet any man ten dollars that I hev his eyes aout on his cheeks and him a-hollerin' for mercy, inside of ten minutes."

"I'll take that bet, Mr. Yancey," replied his antagonist, quietly pulling out his pocket-book. "Sergeant, will you be so good as to hold the stakes?"

He spoke to Jake, who nodded briefly. Yancey, on the other hand, was completely taken down by the prompt acceptance, for he had but a dollar or two in his pocket. He stammered and blustered, but the money was not forthcoming, and his comrades were secretly too much rejoiced at his discomfiture to aid him.

"Vewy well, Mr. Yancey," said Smith, quietly returning the money; "I don't wish to press the point, I assuah you. Sergeant, would you be so good as to take care of my clothes?"

"Sartin, stranger; I will, that."

Then, as leisurely as he had done every thing else, Mr. Smith proceeded to throw off coat, vest, and shirt, in succession, carefully folding each article as he laid it down, and exposing to view a bust which might have been a model for a sculptor, as it was defined beneath a tight silk undershirt.

Bill Yancey, while several inches taller and broader, had a clumsy look beside the other, on account of his huge hands and feet, and angular frame, but his immense reach and brute

strength made him a fearful antagonist, merciless in his gripe, and fierce as a tiger.

The ring of spectators was gathering close to witness the expected contest, when a quick step was heard coming from the companion ladder amidship, and the clear voice of Lieutenant Charlton called out:

"What's this, boys, what's this? Stand aside here."

A moment later, he parted the ring, and stood inside glaring fiercely round, while the men shrunk back before his flashing eye and commanding manner. Even Bill Yancey wilted under his young leader's gaze.

"How's this, Sergeant Yancey?" he demanded, sternly. "Brawling again because of your brute strength? Whom have you been bullying, now?"

He turned and surveyed the Englishman, and started.

"Good heavens, men, this is a *gentleman*. Don't you know that? My dear, sir," he continued earnestly to the Englishman, "I fear my men have insulted you needlessly. You really must not think of fighting that man of mine. He's a dangerous fellow. I'll keep him in better order in future. I'm very, very sorry for this. Fall back, men."

As he waved his hand they fell back, and the two gentlemen, types of different nationalities, were left standing together. Both were handsome and well knit, light and active; the American excelled in length of limb, the Briton in compactness; the one face was fair and rounded in outlines, the other hawk-like in profile, keen and romantic in its beauty; one wore the hair close cropped, the other's curls flowed on his shoulders. Such a contrast of opposite style of manly beauty was very striking.

Charlton wore a rich and picturesque uniform, similar to his men, but heavily laced with gold, and carried a pair of ivory-mounted revolvers in his scarlet sash, besides wearing a light sword.

"Now, my dear, sir," he continued persuasively, "you surely are not going to fight a low ruffian like that, with your bare hands. There's only one way to deal with those fellows. Shoot first and straightest. Now I really must insist on your leaving this business and coming with me."

"Very good of you, I'm sure, sir," said Smith, without his

usual drawl, "but in this case I have taken a fancy to give Mr. Yancey a lesson. Would you be so good as to help your sergeant see fair play? I ask nothing more, I assure you."

Charlton looked at the other in surprise. Then, as his eye fell on the peculiar conformation of the other's arms and bust, he said:

"I see, I see—science, eh!"

Smith laughed.

"You remember Tom Spring. He used to call me his best pupil."

"Take care, though," whispered Charlton. "If that huge brute gets one gripe on you, he'll bite and gouge."

Smith nodded and smiled.

"I don't think he'll get a chance," was all he said.

Then Charlton stepped back.

"Make the ring again, boys," he said. "Sergeant Yancey, for this once, you may fight this gentleman. Time!"

A moment later, Bill Yancey, who had been growing furious at the delay, stepped out, brandishing his brawny arms, and growling.

"Naow, men, see me chaw up the darned Britisher. I'm the Bully of Kentuck, that's what I am, and hyar goes fur your hide, Johnny Bull."

As he spoke, he rushed in, delivering a round-handed blow as he went. Mr. Smith stood with his hands down, watching him keenly. As he came, the Englishman ducked his closely cropt head, like a flash, stooped low by bending his knees apart, and rising as Yancey's left hand was almost on his head, delivered a straight shot, with all the force of his well-knit frame full on the spot in the other's body, denominated by boxers the "mark."

The result was simple. The Kentuckian missed his own blow, and had all the wind knocked out of him in a moment. Curled up in a heap, he turned deathly pale, and sunk on the deck, gasping for breath.

Mr. Smith stood watching him for a moment amid a dead silence, then turned to Jake Rhett observing, blandly:

"Would you be so good as to pick up your man, my good fellow? *He looks as if he wasn't quite well.*"

A roar of laughter greeted the remark, and from that

moment the Englishman was a favorite. There was something so ludicrous in the sudden and utter discomfiture of the "Bully of Kentuck," that the *esprit de corps* of the rangers was not hurt. Moreover, the disaster to Yancey was but a just retribution for his many acts of bullying in the past. For the time being, the Bully of Kentuck was utterly cowed. When he finally rose, it was only with the assistance of others, and he staggered off, still half-doubled up, to the railing, where he speedily relieved himself by a bad fit of vomiting. So weak and sick was he thereafter, that he was unable to walk about till late in the evening, when he was observed to be unusually quiet and gentle. One blow had wrought a wonderful revolution in his whole demeanor.

Meanwhile, the "Belle" proceeded on her path down the river, between the low, alluvial shores of the Southern Mississippi, the pilot keeping a sharp look-out for snags and sawyers; and the usual pleasant routine of life on a Mississippi steamer went on. Three times a day the cabin table was loaded with a profusion of the good fare for which the West is noted, and the "ladies' cabin" echoed to the notes of the piano in the evening, as the more respectable portion of the passengers amused themselves with music and song.

There were plenty of ladies on board, with the substantial planters, who were on their yearly trip down the river, and the society in the ladies' cabin was of that pleasant kind which prevailed in the South thirty-five years ago, when education and refinement centered in a small class, and that class was delightful.

In the ladies' cabin, the officers of the "Death's-Head Rangers," as they were now known, found several old acquaintances, and the time sped rapidly away on the trip to New Orleans. Captain John Winfield was not much of a ladies' man, and was seldom in the cabin, but Mr. Charlton and Will Winfield made up for the deficiencies of their chief by their own unrelenting flirtations with the ladies, married or single, whom they came across.

Standing, as they did, in the light of heroes going to war, and the Texan cause being then a favorite one at the South, the two gentlemen were "in clover;" and if they had any compunctions on the score of the absent ones, to whom they

were respectively engaged, took care not to reveal the unpopular fact.

It was one moonlight evening, when Charlton was seated near the stern-railing, whispering a good deal of soft nonsense in the ear of a certain black-eyed young lady, that he noticed two ladies in deep mourning, closely veiled, descending the companionway, and asked his fair friend :

"Do you know who those ladies are, mademoiselle? One never sees their faces on deck, and they never seem to come into the cabin."

"Oh, yes, they do," she answered, quickly. "They are two sisters, I think. Anyway, they came on board at Louisville, the same time as your men. By-the-by, what a terrible set of fellows you have, Mr. Charlton. It scares me, even to look at them. And then those horrible skulls and bones! I wonder you can wear such things."

Charlton smiled :

"It is but another way of calling them dead shots, mademoiselle. They are all sharp-shooters, you know. But these ladies—you say they came on board at Louisville—what do they look like?"

His companion tossed her head :

"Why do you want to know? Don't you know that it's very poor taste to exhibit curiosity about one lady to another, Mr. Charlton?"

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said Charlton, repentantly, "but I fancied they might be acquaintances of mine, or—"

The young lady looked at him keenly :

"Or something nearer, eh, Mr. Charlton? I've heard that when the cat's away—you know the rest. If you ask much more, I shall begin to think you're engaged. Suppose you are, wouldn't it be fun if your *fiancee* was to come here now, and catch you?"

Charlton shivered slightly, and muttered :

"God forbid."

[CHAPTER VI.

THE RANGERS "AT HOME."

SWIFTLY the Belle sped on her southward path to New Orleans, and at last, one hot morning in October, came to her moorings at the levee, and disgorged her passengers in a broad stream at the Crescent City.

The Death's-Head Rangers, quiet and orderly, stood in a compact body on the lower deck, waiting till the rest of the passengers had debarked. All their noisy, rollicking ways had disappeared, for their officers, with the peculiar tact necessary in dealing with these wild fellows, had succeeded in establishing a perfect moral superiority over them.

The two Winfields and Charlton stood in front of their men, leaning on their swords, like marble statues, and the restless Kentuckians, their pride of imitation aroused, were as steady as regulars. In all, the scene offered a marked contrast to that on the old training-ground at Biggs'. The near neighborhood of war had turned an unruly mob into quiet, orderly soldiers.

Now all the ladies and their escorts had passed over the gangway, and Charlton, watching with subdued curiosity for the two veiled ladies that had attracted his attention, could not see them in all the crowd, though he strained his eyes in vain.

Fancying that they must have been lost among the hosts of taller people, he felt a sensation of disappointment, for the mystery that surrounded them piqued him.

At last the gangway was clear, and Captain Winfield looked round, grave as a judge.

"Attention, company!"

Every man straightened up.

"Now, boys," said the captain, "we're going through the city to our quarters. The Lone Star committee have sent us a band, and all the people will be looking at us. As this is the first company from Kentucky, you are expected to

show what stuff you're made of. Sergeant Yancey, your rifle's leaning over to one side. Straighten up. Now, men, shoulder—arms!"

Up came the rifles to the left shoulders in the old "Scott" fashion of the day, and the deck was as still as the grave. The Death's-Head Rangers had their own peculiarities of drill, as will be seen, but what they knew they knew well.

"Injun file, lope, march!" says Winfield.

With a low shuffle of soft moccasins over the deck, the rangers broke into a long file, at a swing trot, one behind the other, and passed over the gangway, to emerge into a broad, dusty street, packed on either side with a dense crowd, who greeted them with a loud burst of enthusiastic applause.

On one side of the street, in bright scarlet uniforms, were the "Louisiana Guards," to escort the strangers, and a brass band of about twenty pieces struck up the "Star-spangled Banner" as the rangers came loping into the street.

"Company—halt!" shouts Winfield, and every man comes to a stand, as if shot, while the company of escort presents arms. Then the rangers form line and present arms in turn. officers salute, the escort wheels across the street, the band starts off, and the procession marches through the street, followed by the shouting crowd.

The Death's-Head Rangers form into the same long file as before, and go loping through the street in their usual manner. With their strange picturesque dresses, long hair and beards, and loose shambling gait, they form a remarkable contrast to the stiff buttoned-up city militia. Their strides are too long for the music, and necessitate a change of formation peculiar to that eccentric body. Without any verbal order, but at a silent signal from the captain, the two lieutenants pass up abreast of their commander, close to the curb on either side the street, while the rangers break into three separate files, each following an officer, and about thirty feet apart.

Then all of a sudden, the spirits of the wild Kentuckians broke out, when they were behind their officers' backs. Here you might see a long lank ranger leap up in the air, in time to the music, as high as his file-leader's head, toss up his

rifle and catch it, then come down on his moccasined feet as softly as a cat, and march on, as if nothing had happened, without a smile on his face.

A moment later, another fellow threw his rifle to his next man, and darted out of the line, turning himself into a living cart-wheel by a succession of handsprings for the next fifty feet or so, in dead silence, then resuming his place in the file, with an expression of severe gravity.

At one time the whole of the center file, finding that their long strides were bringing them on the heels of their captain, halted and commenced leaping in the air, in time to the music, till the requisite distance was gained.

The dead silence and gravity which was preserved made all these antics still more ludicrous, and the wondering crowd, at first still from astonishment, began to laugh, till the laugh expanded into a general roar, and Captain Winfield started and turned round.

As he did so, the whole of the left file was imitating the jumping maneuver of the center, and Will Winfield, stolidly marching in front, was apparently blissfully unconscious of the disorder in his rear.

Captain Winfield looked gravely at the jumpers, with a twinkle in his eye that contradicted the severe gravity of his countenance. At the same moment, the jumpers caught sight of their commander, and instantly settled down to marching step, as quiet as lambs.

The change to quiet was as comic as had been the previous antics, and again the crowd laughed loud and long.

Captain Winfield said nothing. He only coughed, and made a silent signal to his two subalterns. Therafter, both kept their eyes on their men, and the antics ceased.

The march continued in perfect order, the crowd increasing momentarily, for every one in the city had heard of the Kentucky Rangers, and the Lone Star State was in the height of its popularity. At last the large building was reached, which was to be the quarters of the rangers, during their stay in the city, and the escorting company wheeled out. Then, preceded by the band, the Death's-Head Rangers took possession of their new quarters, the "Guards" followed

them in, the procession broke up, and the restraints of discipline were removed.

A few minutes later the great hall—it was an old sugar warehouse—resounded with shouts and yells, as the liberated Kentuckians dispersed in the maddest license. The long restraint of shipboard and the privation of all liquors had produced on them the effect of prison life. The release brought a reaction to the opposite extreme.

The Louisianians were by no means loth to encourage the antics of the strangers, being mostly the sons of wealthy planters or merchants, and what is called “gay boys,” themselves. Within an hour from the time the rangers marched in, the hall presented the appearance of a lunatic asylum in full blast, for out of some three hundred people, rangers, guards, bands-men and citizens, the difficulty was to find a single sober man. Kentuckians and Creoles were dancing and yelling, wrestling in rough horse-play, swearing eternal fidelity, singing songs, and all making frequent applications to various demijohns. The remarkable thing about it was, that there was no fighting. This was explicable from a total absence of the Celtic element in the crowd. Your Anglo-Saxon is jolly or stupid in his cups, as the case may be, your Gaul mad with gayety, but rarely does either quarrel. Your true Celt, on the other hand, becomes more disposed to fight, the drunker he is, and speedily makes a pandemonium round him. In the West and South in those days, the Celtic element was almost unknown.

It was while the revel in the old sugar-house was at its hight, the officers having discreetly taken their departure early, that Captain Winfield, who was standing on the porch of the St. Charles, conversing with a group of Texan officers on the prospects of an early-departure, noticed two boys at a little distance from him regarding him earnestly but with an air of bashfulness, as if they wished to address him but hesitated in such a crowd of strangers.

The Texans around were rough-bearded men, in nondescript costumes, bristling with arms, and by no means inviting to look at, but the two lads were obviously of gentle birth and breeding.

Both were exceedingly dark, regular Creoles in appear-

ance, wearing loose trousers and frocks of blue cottonade gayly embroidered, and very broad Panama hats. Both had their hair long and curling over their shoulders, and were decidedly handsome. Such figures were quite common then, the sons of wealthy planters in their national Creole dresses.

Captain Winfield excused himself to his companions, and beckoned the lads forward. Both advanced in a manner decidedly timid and blushing excessively, boy-like.

"Well, my boys," said the old captain, kindly, "you seem to want to speak to me. What can I do for you?"

Both lads looked at each other, stammered, and hesitated. One had dark-brown curls, the other jet-black. It was the dark one that finally said:

"Please, sir, please, captain—we—we heard you were coming—and we—we want to enlist with you, sir."

Then both trembled and looked imploringly at Winfield. The Texan officers, rough as they were, seemed to be gentlemen, for not one of them laughed, though it cost them a struggle to hide it.

Captain Winfield smiled gravely and shook his head.

"My poor little fellows, you don't know what you ask! We are going on service that demands strong men; and you—how old are you, my lads, and what are your names?"

Again the dark one spoke for both:

"I am sixteen, sir, and my brother a year younger, but we are strong. My name is François Chaumette, and my brother is Auguste."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE RECRUITS.

THE captain looked doubtfully at these little would-be recruits.

"Young gentlemen," he said, "I don't wish to hurt your feelings, but I don't see how I can possibly take you. As I said, we are going on desperate duty. Fatigue, hunger, thirst and hard-fighting, are all we can look forward to, with any

certainty. We may succeed, we may not. Do you think you could ride for thirty-six hours at a stretch and then sleep on the ground in a rain-storm, with a piece of tough beef for supper, if in luck, and nothing at all, if out of luck?"

It was Auguste who answered now.

"Yes, captain, I'm sure I could, if a man could."

"Humph!" grunted Winfield; "you think so, perhaps. Well, could you fight a Mexican lancer or a Comanche brave at his own weapons, with those little hands of yours that look like those of a girl?"

François spoke up, pertly:

"We don't need to, while there are six shots in a Colt's revolver. I can shoot as straight as any man. None of your men carry lances, so we're as well off as they are."

Winfield gave a grim chuckle.

"You've one thing in your favor—pluck. Well, then, suppose I take you, the other men are so rough that they'll half-kill you with their horse-play, before you're two days enlisted."

It was Auguste of the brown locks who interposed:

"Please, captain, we don't want to enlist as privates. We are musicians, and François and I can sound all the bugle-calls. We want to go as buglers."

The captain's face cleared.

"Ah, that's a different matter, boys. That might be possible. But my men don't know the calls. What use would you be then?"

"I'll undertake to teach them, sir," said François, eagerly, "if you'll only take us. We've got our uniforms all ready, and our horses and arms, and all we want is your permission."

"How came you to have your uniforms all ready?" asked Winfield, in a tone of surprise.

"Oh, we heard you were coming, long ago," said François, quickly; "and Auguste and I made up our minds we would go with the next company bound for Texas, at any cost."

Winfield looked gravely at the eager boys, saying:

"Young gentlemen, suppose I consent to take you, have you your parents' consent also?"

"We are orphans," said François, promptly.

"But you have guardians?"

The boys looked at each other and smiled. François then said :

"To tell you the truth, captain, our guardian has sloped for Texas himself, and we may very possibly find him there. If so, we intend to settle accounts with him."

And the boy significantly placed his hand on his right hip, as if drawing a pistol. Winfield smiled grimly.

"Do you suppose a musketo like you could scare a man in Texas? Well, boys, I'll see. Here comes my brother and Charlton. If they think well of it, you can go."

Both lads clasped their hands with every expression of delight, as the captain spoke. Then they put their heads together and began to whisper in their rapid Creole French, as the two lieutenants of the rangers came along the piazza to where they stood.

"Well, gentlemen, what are the boys doing?" asked the captain.

Charlton laughed.

"All hands crazy just now, but beginning to tire of it. By sunset they'll be asleep, and we can get them on board the steamer in cart-loads. Those Guards are high boys, but they can't drink with the Rangers."

"Well, gentlemen, I want your advice. We have no buglers, as you know, and here are two enthusiastic young gentlemen who want to enlist with us in that capacity."

Will Winfield turned and surveyed the lads with some curiosity.

"By Jove," he muttered, under his grizzled mustache, "those little runts won't do at all. Blow 'em away."

Charlton was more favorable.

"They're pretty little fellows," he said, in a low tone. "We shall have to let them mess near us, though. The mez would kill them in two days."

Captain Winfield turned to his brother.

"Will, what do you say? Shall we take them?"

Will shrugged his shoulders.

"I've nothing to say. Please yourself. They can't do much mischief, one way or the other."

The boys had been eagerly listening to the conversation,

and seemed to have caught every word, for François said, in his pert, quick way:

"The little runts thank you for your condescension, Mr. Winfield, and will endeavor to disprove your very flattering opinion. Captain, in one word, can we go? Yes or no?"

"Yes," said the old captain, slowly. "When will you be ready? The steamer sails in six hours from sunset."

"We shall be on board, horses and all, before that time," said François. "Of course, captain, we can mess and tent together, near you, can we not, sir?"

"Certainly, when we have tents," said Charlton, laughing; "but it's little tents you'll ever see in Texas, I fancy."

François drew himself to an altitude of at least four feet ten.

"I was addressing Captain Winfield, not you, sir."

The captain laughed right out.

"Youngster, you've a great deal to learn, I see. When an officer speaks to you, you must answer respectfully."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, captain," said the boy, with a sudden humility of manner. "I didn't mean to be disrespectful to you, sir."

"Not to me, but to Mr. Charlton."

"Well, sir, I haven't got my uniform on yet," said the boy quickly, "so I can use my tongue a little longer."

Charlton laughed good-naturedly.

"You can wag it against me as long as you like, my boy, except on duty. I don't quarrel with men of such tremendous prowess as you. But mind you don't try on any impudence before the men."

"Why, what would you do?" suddenly demanded Auguste, who had been hitherto silent, standing boldly up beside the young officer, in a defiant manner as he spoke.

Charlton looked down hard into the lad's face before he answered.

"Well, I don't know exactly. I might twist your little neck, if you didn't look so like some one I once knew. But don't try it, boy, that's all I say."

For some reason the two boys seemed struck dumb at his words, and retired hastily. As they went, Will Winfield remarked

"John, those boys will never do. They've too much tongue and too little muscle. Look more like girls than men going on hard service."

John Winfield shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, that's their look-out. I tried to dissuade them. By the by, have you seen our English friend, Smith? He tells me he wants to come along, too."

"How, as a recruit?"

"Oh, no. He's made what you may call a handsome offer to me personally."

"And what's that, captain?" asked Charlton.

"He offers to pay down a thousand dollars, for the use of the company, if we will guarantee to see him safe through Texas and show him all the attractions, such as buffalo-hunts, mustang drives, Indian fights, battles with the Greasers and such like."

"I vote we take the offer," said Will Winfield. "Horses are cheap at Galveston, they tell me. Twenty dollars a head in the herds a fair price. A thousand dollars will mount half the company."

"We shall have to take a vote on it," said Charlton, seriously. "We can't ask the boys to take care of dead weight without putting it to the vote first. This Englishman won't be worth his salt on the prairie."

"I agree with you," said the captain. "A thousand dollars is an object in the present state of our treasury, as we have to mount the boys when we get to Texas, but the Englishman will be a great nuisance—he's such an infernal lunk-head."

"I don't know that," said Will Winfield, quietly. "He laid out Bill Yancey the other day, pretty smartly."

"That's all very well," said Charlton half contemptuously, "but boxing isn't shooting, you know; and I never saw an Englishman that could shoot. Boxing won't be much good where we go."

"I vote to take the money," said Will Winfield, decidedly. "Put it to the boys in the proper light and they'll jump at it. Fifty horses don't jump into your arms every day."

"I say, let's go and submit it to the boys, right off," said Charlton.

"They're too drunk to listen," said Will. "They'll consent, if we take the offer. If they haven't confidence in us, I, for one, don't want to be an officer. What do you say, John?"

"I say, we'll put it to the man himself," said John, quietly. "I see him coming out of the hotel, now. I'll bet he's been dressing, as if he was in London. Twig the kids."

The three officers looked round and beheld Mr. Smith coming toward them from the great porch of the hotel, got up in a costume entirely different from his check traveling suit. A white hat surmounted his head, his whiskers spread out in luxuriant profusion over the velvet collar of a glossy brown coat, while a diamond pin flashed from the midst of a dark-blue satin scarf. His trowsers were of a pale brickdust color, and he carried in his hand the inevitable silk umbrella, while a gold mounted glass reposed over his left eye, caught there by a contraction of the muscles. More British than ever, he was now the Bond street dandy instead of the tourist, and a marked contrast to the rough Texans, who surveyed him as he advanced, as if he had been some strange wild beast. Mr. Smith, as usual, seemed loftily unconscious of observation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEXANS.

"Ah, my deah captain, delighted to meet you once moah, I assuah you. Those barbarous boats are enough to kill a fellah. I assuah you I haven't felt so well for weeks as this afternoon, since I've shaved and had a bawth. 'Pon my life, Winfield, this is a splendid country, my deah fellah. Perfectly splendid this city, I assuah you."

"I'm glad you like it," said Winfield, politely. "I was just telling these gentlemen of your proposition, Mr. Smith, and we are divided in opinion. We wish to accept your offer, but we have to put it to vote among the men, as they, after all, are the parties interested."

Mr. Smith slightly elevated his eyebrows.

"Ah, indeed? I don't pwoless to know any thing about these mattahs, you know. In England, I believe, the officers don't ask their men whether they like a thing. They obey ordahs, you know."

"England's a darned old down-trodden nest o' tyrants," said one of the Texans, standing by. "We do things different, hyar, stranger."

"Ah—yes—indeed—quite so, I assuah you—Mr.—ah—" said Mr. Smith, turning with his bland smile. "Vewy different indeed, I see."

"Yes, stranger," said the Texan, cutting a plug of tobacco with his huge knife, "and ef you want to get 'long raound hyar, you'd best come daown to aour institootions. This hyar's a republic, and aour boys don't stand orderin' abaout, though they'll fight like a hull craowd of tomcats in a cellar, with their tails afire."

"Ah, I beg your pardon, Mr.—ah—would you be so good, my deah Winfield, as to introduce us?"

"Certainly. Gentlemen, Mr. Smith, of London. Mr. Smith, General Burton, General Hodges, General Harker, Colonel Powers, Major Greer."

"Ah, I'm suah, vewy happy to meet so many distinguished officahs. General Burton, I was about to observe, that no man can question the—ah—fighting qualities of your troops. It is only their—ah—discipline that strikes a stwangah, you know—ah—somewhat loose, you know."

"I reckon you're right thar, stranger," said one of the Texan Generals, frankly; "but you kurn't tie these boys down too suddint. We hev to do the best we kin, and we hev done some tall fightin'."

"I don't doubt it, I'm suah. Come, gentlemen, I alway make it a point, you know, to follow the customs of a countwy I'm in. In Wussia I dwink twain oil with the natives. Would you be so good as to step into the bah with me?"

In a moment the faces of the Texans were wreathed with smiles, and every man turned toward the bar. The Englishman had won their hearts.

A little later, they were standing in the gorgeous bar-room

of the St. Charles, discussing the prospects of the war, and the likelihood of ultimate success.

"And what have you finally concluded—ah—about my pwoposition?" presently demanded Mr. Smith of the Ranger captain.

"Well, if you're willing to take the risk, I suppose we must consent," said John Winfield, doubtfully.

"Ah—but my deah fellow, I don't want any wisk, I assuah ou. If I wanted wisk, I'd go alone. My pwoposal is, to pay you a thousand dollahs, for which you are to carry me through Texas, and show me the lions you know, the fights and that sort of thing, you know what I mean—and I'm not to have any twouble, you know, or dangeah."

"Good offer," said General Hodges, heartily. "Take it, Cap. Ef you don't, I will, that's what's the matter with Hannah."

"Well, then, it's a bargain," said Winfield, putting his hand in the other's. "But mind, I can't insure you against risk if we all get killed, and it's possible we may."

"Oh, my deah boy, of course, you know, I know all that sort of thing, you know. I'm satisfied. When do you sail?"

"To-night, at twelve o'clock."

"Sharp work, by Jove. Are these officahs going with you?"

"Only Major Greer. He commands the battalion to which we have been attached."

"Ah, indeed. Has he served before?"

"Don't know. Major, have you served before?"

"Reckon so. Out at Goliad with Fannin. Nearly lost my hair coming back. *Did* lose every man 'cept me and Dan Henrie."

Mr. Smith looked at the major gravely and critically. The major was a slight, sickly-looking fellow, with red hair and freckled face, altogether unlike a desperate character.

"Ah—pardon me—but would you be so good as to tell me if you mean that you were at the massacre of Goliad, that I wead about in the papah?"

The major turned and eyed him from head to foot.

"Yes. Don't you believe it?"

"Certainly, I assuah you. But—were you wounded?"

The major raised his hand to his head, and lifted his long hair, exposing to view a huge red scar, that traversed the skull from front to rear.

"That's a Greaser's saber, stranger. I rid fifty-seven miles arter that clip. Shot the Greaser, and got scopete* ball in this thigh. Ef you know when you're well off, keep out of Texas."

Mr. Smith smiled.

"Vewy good of you, I'm suah. You see, I've taken a fancy to see all that there is to be seen in Americah, you know, and my people would laugh at me most awfully, if I was to come back without seeing Texas, you know. You see, I promised my mothah to bring home a gwizzly beah's skin, you know, for a wug, you know, and one or two scalps, you know, and all that sort of thing, you know, just to give her an idea what sort of a place Americah is, you know."

"Stranger," said Major Greer, gravely, "you take my advice and stay here. You can get a grizzly hide and scalps by paying for them, but you can't get back your own scalp if once it gets lifted. I've been thar, and I know it."

Mr. Smith smiled and lifted his hat, exposing his closely-cropped head.

"My deah fellow, I defy any Indian fellow to scalp me. Of course, I'm not used to that sort of thing, you know, but I fancy there's not much dangeah amongst these—ah—cwack-shots and all that sort of thing, these wangeah fellahs, you know."

The major took up his glass somewhat sulkily.

"Go, if you like. Don't say I didn't warn you."

"But, my dear majah," said Smith, blandly, "if it's such a vewy disagweeable place, why do *you* go back theah?"

Major Greer seemed transformed at the question. His quiet, freckled face grew white as death, and his eyes glared like live coals. His voice sunk to a hoarse whisper, as he said:

"I was Fannin's chum, sir, and I have his fate to avenge. When Texas is free of the cursed Greasers, I'm ready to die."

The eccentric major glared round like a wild beast for a

* Scopete. Slang for escopeta, the Mexican musket.

moment, then suddenly strode out of the room, followed by the compassionate glances of several present.

"He's out of his head, times, I reckon," whispered one of the "Generals." "That clip of the saber must hev done it. Then he was a dear friend of poor Fannin, who was killed at Goliad, and folks say he's never been the same since. But I believe thar's a woman in the business, somewhar', if we 'u'd hunt her up. Never seen the muss there warn't, you now."

They discussed in low tones the eccentricities of the "mad major," as he was called, for some time, till the afternoon began to draw on, when on a sudden, the sound of bugles in the street, blowing the stirring call, "To arms," roused them and caused them to run out on the porch.

There, in front of the hotel, mounted on beautiful, spotted mustang ponies, were the two boys who had called themselves Chaumette, each with a handsome silver bugle at his lips, blowing the call.

They were uniformed and caparisoned in a style of the most extravagant finery, their hunting-shirts and leggings blazing with gold fringe, while their deep Mexican saddles were studded with silver.

Each wore a brace of ivory-mounted revolvers in his crimson sash, but no other weapons, and instead of hats, each wore a fur cap with a fox-tail for plume.

"Ey heavens, Cap, we did well to enlist those youngsters," said Charlton, with admiration, "for they'll take the men by storm. Did you ever see handsomer little fellows?"

"They're most too pretty for boys," said Winfield, critically. "They ought to be girls. Here's Will, now, the artist, he shall tell us. Will, ain't those little buglers more like girls than boys?"

Will closed one eye and looked at the two buglers. They certainly, with their long curls and smooth faces, did look girlish, but there was an air of self-reliance and saucy independence about them which few girls assume, but natural to boys.

"Guess they're boys, after all," he remarked. "What would two girls do in Texas, among our ruffians?"

As he spoke, the Rangers came pouring out of the sugar

house opposite, attracted by the sound of the bugle, and stood in drunken astonishment and admiration, watching the little buglers.

The next moment, with a wild yell of welcome, they rushed across the street, and crowded round the boys with the utmost eagerness, but with perfect respect.

"Oh, Lordy, boys," shouted Jim Harrod. "Ef they ain't too pooty, I'll eat a hull bar o' soap. Ki! look at the horns and the goold lace! Say, sonny, air you to stay with us for good?"

"If you like," said François, smiling, but very pale. The rush of the wild, half-drunken ruffians had evidently discomposed the lads.

Harrod threw a back somerset, with a wild screech of delight, and the rangers burst out yelling.

From that moment the boys were safe and favorites. Their pretty looks had saved them from even a touch.

CHAPTER IX.

FOOT CAVALRY.

IN the midst of the rolling green prairies that surround San Antonio, a body of some three hundred men were bivouacked, in open column, around their little camp-fires of brush and dried buffalo-chips.

The green hunting-shirts of the Death's-Head Rangers were contrasted with the deer-skin dresses of three other companies of Rangers, the whole under command of the eccentric and sickly-looking Major Greer. There were but few horses in camp, only those of the officers and the dapper little buglers of the Kentuckians, and deep and earnest were the imprecations of the Rangers on the country into which they had come. Instead of horses being plentiful at Houston, it was found that the Mexicans had driven them all away, and none were to be had nearer than San Antonio, around which were scattered several large haciendas.

And San Antonio was once more in Texan hands, but Santa Anna was reported to be approaching it with several thousand men, to overwhelm the Texans by pure force of numbers.

By slow and easy marches, amid much grumbling and straggling, the Rangers had been coaxed along to their present position, when they were cheered up by the arrival of a courier from San Antonio, to announce the capture of several hundred saddles, and that the haciendados were coming in with horses for sale.

In the midst of the ranger camp, tranquilly seated in front of a large bell-tent, with several pack-mules tethered near, and a little runt of a mustang feeding in sight, was the imperturbable figure of Mr. Smith, with an aspect more English than ever. Several portmanteaus, strong and heavy, lay around; he sat on an elaborate camp-stool; and in front of him was a light camp-table, spread with a substantial breakfast, waited on by a swarthy Mexican. In the midst of war and tumult, the power of gold had done wonders. Mr. Smith, serene amidst the trials of the march, managed to secure for himself as much comfort as a general officer.

It was a point to the credit of the wild Rangers, that, having once consented to the bargain for the Briton's protection, on a unanimous vote, they never annoyed him in any way. The spectacle of this serene comfort must have been decidedly aggravating to them, but the rudest never uttered a growl in his hearing.

The two little buglers had become pets in the camp, and the men of the Death's-Head Rangers were in constant receipt of tempting offers from the other companies for their possession, much as if they had been pretty little lap-dogs. These offers were always refused, and the Rangers guarded their treasures with lynx-eyes, as if they feared to have them stolen from them.

On the morning in question, the two lads were standing by the tent of the eccentric Briton, whispering together, when Captain Winfield's voice was heard from a neighboring bivouac.

"Francois! Auguste! Sound boots and saddles. Here come the horses."

A universal yell rose from the camp as the well-known notes pealed out. During the passage from New Orleans the Rangers had been taught the principal calls, and recognized this one in a moment.

Every man started to his feet and looked anxiously round, to be greeted by a welcome sight. The white tilts of four huge Conestoga wagons were seen coming toward them from San Antonio, and a great cloud of dust on one side marked the advance of a great herd of horses, coming with the wagons, escorted by a dozen swarthy Mexicans, in their gay national costume.

"Hooroar for Texas!" shouts Harrod, leaping in the air in his usual mad style. "Now we'll show the Greasers somethin', boys! Darn this mud-mashin' and hooroar for the hosses!"

In another moment, the rangers were rushing out of the camp like a crowd of lunatics, as if they expected to seize the horses at once; and commenced playing their usual wild antics over the prairie, like a parcel of school-boys.

Major Greer and the other officers leaped on their horses and galloped out in front of the men, ordering them sternly into camp, but all was no use, till Winfield shouted:

"You infernal jackasses, do you want to stampede the horses? Get into camp, every one of you, or I'll send the brutes back, and you shall foot it all through the war."

This brought them to their senses, especially when they perceived most decided symptoms of alarm in the approaching crowd of horses; and they stole back to camp in silence, and waited the arrival of their chargers.

Up to the camp rumbled the wagons, escorted by some twenty wild-looking rangers, as rough as every thing else in Texas; and the leader rode in, calling out:

"Hyar's the saddles, boys! We had a sight o' trouble to git 'em, but them Greasers was very kind to let us take 'em. Tumble 'em out, and help yourselves. Santy Anny paid for em, and they're raal good stuff."

The rangers needed no second invitation. In those days requisitions, receipts, and invoices, were at a discount in Texas. What they could capture they used, and the rule was, "first come, first served."

Mr. Smith quietly surveyed the scene of uproar that ensued, without a smile on his face. Then he rose from his seat, pulled out a cigar-case, and offered it to Will Winfield, who was standing near, saying:

"Winfield, my deah boy, your fellahs are wefweshingly ouriginal. If they did such a thing with English twoops, there'd be a wow. I must say I'm glad I came to Texas. One sees life heah."

Winfield took the offered cigar, and laughed.

"We do things a little different from the old country. You see, with all the license, there's no squabbling. Each company goes to its own wagon, and they observe fair play."

"My deah boy, it's positively a new sensation, I assuah you. I must twy to buy a horse to-day. That pony isn't up to my weight."

"Horses will be cheap enough, I guess. Look there."

As he spoke the herd of horses, several hundred in number, came to a stand in front of the camp, while the herdsmen galloped round them to keep them within bounds. A wild-looking lot of mustangs they were, as little tamed as their free brethren of the prairie, to all seeming. With glaring eyes and disheveled manes they stood crowded together, or pranced and reared impatiently in the crowd, as if defying any one to enter the herd and select a captive.

"It's vewy pwetty, my deah boy," remarked Smith, "but how in the world are we to catch those bwutes, if we buy them?"

"Ask Major Greer," said Winfield, as the major rode toward them, giving some orders as he came.

The question was soon rendered unnecessary, for the process became patent. At a signal from their leaders, the four companies of rangers filed out on the prairie at a dog trot, and soon surrounded the herd, the gaps being filled by the mounted herdsmen and the wagon escort. Every man carried over his shoulder his long scarlet blanket, and moved stealthily, to avoid alarming the horses. The four wagons formed part of the circle, within which the wild horses, before they had any suspicions, were inclosed.

Then one of the Mexicans rode forward and pitched his

long snaky lasso into the air with easy grace, the noose settling over the neck of a handsome gray mare.

The throwing was the signal for a scene of wild confusion, all the horses bursting into a storm of fright and fury, squealing and kicking, and making a resolute dash to one side of the circle. They were halted in a moment by a simultaneous wave of the red blankets. It acted like a charm, topping them as effectually as a stone wall.

Without any apparent effort, the Mexican rode out of the circle, pulling at the end of his lasso the wild mare, whose resistance was perfectly futile. She would run forward to slack the lasso, then rear up and try to wheel round. Every time, she was plucked down and dragged along, half choked, till she dashed forward, in very desperation.

Once outside of the circle, a second Mexican threw her on her side by a dexterous toss of his lasso over her hind feet, and a Texan rushed at her, and hobbled all four legs in an instant. The lassos were loosed, and the tamers started for new victims.

Had they been near a corral, the process would have been much simplified. As it was, the operation promised to become slow and tedious.

The Texan wagon escort, used to prairie life, became impatient of the slow process, and dashed in with their lassos, to the hazard of breaking the line. Twenty horses were secured at a single cast, but nearly a dozen more got away before the gap could be closed, and the experiment was deemed too risky to repeat.

Mr. Smith, who had been watching the proceedings with interest, suddenly remarked, to Charlton:

"My dear boy, I don't know much about this sort of thing, you know, but it seems to me that's a quicker way to secure those brutes."

"What's that?" asked Charlton, carelessly. He didn't believe in the Briton.

"I don't profess to understand, you know, but it seems to me, that if you were to drive them into the coveasse yonder, they would be quite safe."

Charlton started and looked at the Englishman with more respect. He remembered that there was a deep chasm in the

prairie formed by the rains, not a hundred yards from camp, with perpendicular sides. Such chasms are common in Texas and Louisiana, under the names of *arroyo* and *crevasse*, respectively. The one in question was some twenty feet in breadth, by as many in depth, about a quarter of a mile long, and ran up into the level on either side. It would hold the herd with ease, and, once in, would only need guarding at either outlet.

With all his affectation, Mr. Smith was clearly a man of common sense.

CHAPTER X.

HORSE-TAMING.

CHARLTON rode round to Major Greer with the Englishman's suggestion, and it was speedily put to the test, amid universal approbation. The frightened herd, irresistibly driven by the waving scarlet blankets, gladly seized the way of promised escape, and dashed into the crevasse, filling it from end to end, till halted by the inevitable foe at the other end.

After that, the work of selection went rapidly on. Thirty lassos going at once, speedily reduced the herd in numbers, and the trembling, snorting captives, as fast as brought out, were thrown and securely hobbled, then left to exhaust themselves in useless struggles, while their comrades took their turns.

An hour later, about three hundred and fifty horses lay on the grass, and the old Mexican hacendado came up to demand his pay. The animals were delivered at a price of fifteen dollars apiece, as they lay.

"Smahly, they don't mean to call those bwutes fit to ride?" said Smith, in a tone of wonder, as he heard the demand.

"*Si, senor, muy mansos, muy mansos*," said the old fellow, grinning.

"Mansos! Gentle! By Jove!" was all the Briton could ejaculate, as he looked around, and saw the frantic struggles

of the imprisoned brutes. "Do you mean to say I'm expected to ride one of them, as they are?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* We always do it."

"Oh, well," said Smith, quietly, "if it's the custom, heah, I suppose I can do it too."

"If the senor wishes, I will let Miguel tame his horse for him," said the haciendado, sweetly; "but the charge will be *dos pesos*—two—vat you call dollair."

"Thanks. Call up Miguel, whoever he is, Mr.—ah—Mr.—"

"Don Juan Pescado de Mendoza y Cortes y Zarate y Jovellar y—"

"Yaas, yaas, Don Juan, very much obliged, I'm suah. Call up Miguel, or whatever the fellah's name may be. I'll pay him two dollars with gweat pleasuah."

The old Mexican turned and called up one of his servants who came galloping up, the coils of his lasso hanging over his arm.

The haciendado gave him some directions in his rapid Spanish, and Miguel grinned.

"*En donde es el cavallo, senor?*" (Where is the horse sir?)

Don Juan pointed to a blood-bay stallion, which lay on the ground at a little distance, apparently exhausted with struggling. The Mexican leaped off his horse, unsaddled it in a twinkling, and approached the prostrate stallion. Seeing him approach, the animal leaped up and struggled more fiercely than ever. Miguel dropped his saddle, threw off the long *serape* or cloak from his shoulders, and threw it over the mustang's head, blinding it and rendering it passive in a moment. Then he and the haciendado threw on the saddle, girted it so tight as to draw the captive horse nearly in half, twisted a rope into a temporary halter called a *hakimo*, and released the horse from its hobbles and blinds.

As the frightened creature rose, Miguel leaped on his back, and dug in his long spurs; and the contest commenced, with a series of rearings, kicks, and squeals, hard to describe.

"By Jove!" said Mr. Smith, as he drew to one side, and stood with his hands in his pockets, watching the fight. "I don't know much about this sort of thing, von know, but I

should say that fellow's position was decidedly unpleasant, you know."

Charlton, whom he addressed, laughed.

"That's the way they do it in Texas, Smith. It's all the breaking their horses get, here."

"By Jove!" was Smith's only comment.

Meantime, however, the Rangers were not idle. Like all Kentuckians, and South-western men in general, they were used to breaking colts, and riding any sort of animal. Before Miguel had got his prize started into a wild gallop, at least twenty of the Rangers were in the saddle, and capering about on their frantic animals.

Many were the ludicrous mishaps, for the Kentuckians, not used to prairie horses and Mexican bits, tried to use the latter on the wild horses, instead of the usual *hakimo*. The consequence was, that all who tried the experiment pulled their horses over backward, and had the mortification of being unable to mount again, the tenderness of the horses' mouths sending them up in the air the instant any pressure was laid on the bridle.

Had it not been for the Mexicans in attendance with lassos, many horses might have escaped. As it was, the fugitives were promptly lassoed and brought back, while the herdsmen explained the simple process of making a *hakimo* halter.

In a little while, every man in camp had his horse, and was prancing around, or careering away, full speed, over the prairie, reducing his wild charger to obedience.

Mr. Smith stood with his hands in his pockets, watching, and at last said:

"By Jove, you know, that's fun. Wouldn't mind trying it myself."

"Why don't you do it, then?" asked François Chaumette pertly. He was sitting on his spotted pony, by his brother watching the scene with great interest.

"I don't believe you could stick on," pursued the boy, maliciously. "They tell me that you Englishmen are the poorest riders in the world."

Mr. Smith turned pink. For the first time since his sojourn in the West, the sarcasm of a boy had stung him.

"Oh, I say, by Jove, you know, that's not, you know

It's conceded that the English are the best riders in the world, you know. This sort of thing's all very well, you know, in these high saddles, and all that, but where would these fellows be in a ride 'cross country, you know? By Jove, youngster, it's all rot, you know."

Francois laughed maliciously.

You couldn't ride one of those horses, I'll bet. Let's see you do it."

For a moment Mr. Smith's eyes flashed. Then, as it rested on the slight frame of the boy, he suddenly resumed his old placid demeanor, as he drawled out:

"Thank you. I don't wish to exhibit as a jockey to please little boys, you know. I hire out that sort of work."

"And any thing else that needs courage," said the lad, sneeringly. "I believe if the Comanches were to come into camp, you'd hire out the fighting, too."

"I certainly should," replied Smith, undisturbedly pulling at his cigar.

"I'll bet he wouldn't hire out the *running away*," sneered Auguste to his brother, while both boys laughed to each other.

They seemed bent on provoking the Briton, now he was alone in camp, the officers being away among the horses; and from the quick puffs that came from the Englishman's cigar, and the gradually-increasing paleness of his face, it was evident that their taunts were taking effect.

"It seems to me," said Francois, in a tone of very audible confidence, to his brother, "that *I* wouldn't stick like a drone, in the midst of a camp of fighting-men, for all the money in England."

"Oh, bah," said Auguste, carelessly, "the poor man's no blame. He was born a coward, I suppose."

"He'll have a nice time in Texas, then," said Francois, laughing.

At that moment Mr. Smith suddenly bit through his cigar, spit the stump out of his mouth, and turned round.

In a couple of strides he was alongside of the two lads, and addressed them in a low, soft tone of voice, standing between the two horses:

"Young gentlemen, were you ever at school?"

"Oh, yes," said Francois, carelessly. "We've finished our education."

"Not quite," said Mr. Smith, quietly. "They forgot to teach you one thing, my dear boy."

"Ah, by Jove," said the lad, pertly, mimicking the Englishman's accent; "and what was that, pway?"

"Manners," said Smith, gravely.

Both lads were silent, and August blushed a little.

"You see, my deah boy," continued the Briton, in his usual drawl, and resuming his natural color, "diffewent countwies have diffewent manners, but gentlemen are the same in all. Were you ever caned, either of you?"

"No, sir," cried Francois, indignantly. "I'd like to see the man dare cane me. I'd shoot him dead."

"Ah," said Smith, indifferently; "I used to get it, vewy often. I see they neglected your education, my boy. Well, I've only one thing to say, you know. Chaffing's very well, and all that sort of thing; but, by Jove, impudence is another sort of thing, altogether. So, if you continue to trouble yourselves about my affairs, I shall be obliged—ah—to—ah—turn you over my knee and chastise you—do you understand?"

As the Englishman spoke, he was resting a hand on the cantel of either saddle, and smiling very placidly up at the two boys.

With a sudden cry of fury, Francois placed his hand on one of the little pistols in his belt. In a moment, Mr. Smith caught him and his brother round the waist, in each arm, and plucked them from the saddle like two babies, saying, rapidly:

"Oh, by Jove, you know, I say, I've seen that trick before, you know."

Then, as suddenly as he had seized them, he let them go, with a low "By Jove!" and stood staring at them with a look of amazement on his face, utterly regardless of the fact that each had drawn a pistol and was looking at him like a viper ready to bite.

Mr. Smith put up his hand with a deprecating gesture, saying:

"Don't shoot. You can say any thing you like. By Jove, you know, I hadn't the least ideah, you know. I apologize

'pon honor, I do. I hadn't the least ideah, I assuah you. *By Jove !*"

And Mr. Smith fairly retreated to his tent, where he was heard laughing to himself, and repeating :

"By Jove, what an ideah ! 'Pon my soul ! By Jove !"

The two lads looked at each other in silence, till Francois aid, in a low, frightened tone :

"Now what's to be done ? *He's found it out !*"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST SCOUT.

A LONG column of horsemen, four abreast, were riding at a walk over the rolling green prairies, clothed with the short mesquit grass, toward the southern frontier of Texas. The little ivory ornaments in their broad gray hats announced them as the Death's-Head Rangers, and Winfield rode at their head.

In the midst of the column was a group of pack-mules, loaded with camp-furniture, and the plaid traveling-suit, white hat and natty little field-glass of the imperturbable Mr. Smith were seen at the side of the commanding officer.

Mr. Smith had not adopted the Texan manners in his riding. On the contrary, both equipments and riding were essentially British, for he sported a bran-new hunting-saddle of London make, with the usual complicated bridle-gear of a Hyde Park dandy, curb, snaffle, and martingale. His seat was as different from that of the Texans as could be. They sat upright in the center of the Mexican saddle, with the leg nearly straight, and loose bridle, managed by a turn of the finger, the true military seat. The Englishman sat far back on his long saddle, with his knees well forward, the leg much bent, the stirrup well home under the instep, the snaffle nearly tight, using both hands to turn his horse. That both methods had their advantages and disadvantages was illustrated during the day's march.

When Mr. Smith's animal, suddenly and without any warning, shied at the bleaching skeleton of a horse, his rider was thrown to one side nearly out of the saddle, and lost a stirrup. On the other hand when jumping any of the numerous crevasses that intersected the prairie, the Texans were thrown up from their saddles in many cases, where the Briton retained his equilibrium without moving.

Many and animated were the discussions on these points during the march, always ending in mutual concessions as to the merits of the different styles.

Behind the captain, perched on the top of a fiery mustang of the color known in Texas as "buck-skin," was little Jack Rhett, orderly sergeant of the Rangers. Like all the other sergeants and corporals, he had been elected on account of his superior shooting, and his rank was the result of his being the best shot among the men.

"But I knock under to Cap Winfield," he would remark. "He kin cover a hoel quicker'n any man I ever seen, and quickness air wuth a heap in a mixed muss, *I tell you.*"

Sergeant Yancey ranked next to Rhett, and Harrod followed, as the Rangers rode over the lonely prairie. They were on their first scout after the enemy, supposed to be advancing on the Alamo, a fort close to San Antonio, afterward mournfully celebrated as the scene of the death of Davy Crockett and Bowie of Arkansas.

Far in advance of the main body of the Rangers rode Charlton with some dozen horsemen spread out in a long line. At every swell of the prairie they would halt a moment to survey the landscape ahead, then trot on to the next rise, to repeat the maneuver. Old Winfield was obviously not the man to be taken by surprise.

The two little buglers, unusually silent and reticent, since the little passage of arms with the Englishman, rode at the head of the column near the captain, and Will Winfield was conversing with Smith himself.

"Well, my deah fellow," the latter was saying, "I don't understand much about this sort of thing, you know; but I should call this life decidedly jolly, 'pon my word. It's a regular picnic, by Jove."

"So it is, as long as we don't meet the Greasers," said Will, dryly; "but they have a knack of coming down about three to one, and spoiling the fun."

"Ah, well, that's not my affair, you know," returned Smith, indifferently; "and I assuah you, I should think it decidedly jolly, you know, to see your fellows handle them. There's Sergeant Yancey, now, he's able to eat up at least five f the fellows for breakfast, I should say."

"You kin bet your boots on that, stranger," said Yancey, affably joining in the conversation. "I'll allow you're some on science with yer bar' hands, but when it comes to shootin', Bill Yancey's thar all the time."

"Kin ye put six balls of seven in the same hoel, surgint?" asked Jake Rhett, dryly. "Ef not, ye'd better quit blowin'."

Yancey laughed good-naturedly. The prairie life had taken a good deal of the bully and conceit out of him.

"Thar you hev me, old hoss," he said. "Wait till a scrimmage comes, though, and we'll see who'll shoot straightest."

Whirr! whirrr! !

Up started a covey of grouse almost from under the horses' feet and went off over the prairie. The Texans hardly noticed them but Mr. Smith's eyes flashed, as he ejaculated:

"By Jove! if I only had a gun, how I could take those fellows down."

"Why don't you get your gun out, then?" said Will Winfield. "I saw one in your baggage."

"By Jove, a good ideah! Where's Antonio?"

Calling his servant, he dispatched him to the rear, and speedily had in his hand a handsome double-barrel gun with its appurtenances.

Jake Rhett eyed it with some disdain, and observed:

"Waal, stranger, seems to me, ef I war you, I'd swop that ere popgun away fur a good rifle. What's the use of that on the perarer?"

Whirrr! ! !

A second covey, larger than the first, got up, and Mr Smith pitched the gun to his shoulder, dropping three birds

to the two barrels. As the echo of the shot died away, he observed, dryly :

"There's one use, Mr.—ah—Rhett. Gwouse are vewy good eating."

At a sign from his master, Antonio, the Mexican servant, galloped forward, and retrieved the three birds with the ease of a born horseman, by stooping from the saddle at full speed and picking them from the ground. Mr. Smith quietly re-loaded his gun and rode on.

A moment later these little diversions were brought to an untimely close by the maneuvers of the advanced guard.

They were observed to halt on the top of a swell, and almost immediately after, the white puffs of smoke along the ridge followed by the reports of the rifles, told that they had met some enemy.

In a moment the careless jocularities of the rangers was broken up. Captain Winfield, who had been silently observant all the while, spoke at last.

"Company, halt ! corral the baggage ! Sergeant Yancey take the last eight men and keep camp ! Lieutenant Winfield, take your platoon and gallop out to support skirmishers ! Gallop, sir ! The rest, form line ! No eagerness, men ! Steady there ! I command this company ! Silence in the ranks !"

The tendency to disorder was quelled in a moment by the sudden sternness of the leader, and the orders were rapidly obeyed. Will Winfield, with twenty-four men, galloped away to the front at full speed, his men deploying as they went and speedily reached the ridge where Charlton and his men were still firing away.

As they gained the top they uttered a wild yell, and the reinforced party disappeared on the other side amid a furious burst of firing. Meantime the pack-mules in the center of the column were rapidly unloaded, and the packs arranged into a sort of inclosure, called a corral, while the mules, closely hobbled, were thrown on the grass outside. Within this inclosure Mr. Smith took his seat, with all the coolness imaginable, while Yancey and his eight men, dismounted, stood on guard round it.

The rest of the rangers formed a line and slowly advanced,

led by Winfield, with their rifles laid over the saddle. The two little buglers, pale and trembling, yet stuck close to the captain till he turned round.

"Go back to camp, lads," he said, sternly. "This is man's work, and you'll only be in the way. Go back, I say. No murmuring."

The boys, as if half reluctant and yet relieved, turned their ponies and went slowly back to the camp, where they silently dismounted and took their seats behind the imperturbable Englishman.

"Waal, boys," said Yancey, good-naturedly, "gwine to see the fun? Don't be skeery. I'll allow it's a risky biz at first, but these air the Death's-Head Rangers, and we air the boys to lay out the Greasers, you bet."

"Ah—Mr. Yancey," said the Englishman, quietly, "would you be so good as to tell me why you call the Mexicans 'Greasahs'? Merely a matter of curiosity, I assuah you."

As he spoke, he lighted a cigar and puffed away.

Yancey looked at Smith, then he listened to the firing, which was growing very rapid behind the swell. He scratched his head.

"Waal, stranger, I kurn't say dezackly, 'cept that it's 'cause all the boys call 'em so, and 'cause the brutes eats so much ile and grease. Seems to me it's a curis question to ax, about this time."

"My deah Mr. Yancey, no time like the present, I assuah you. Your fellows are all busy, and we've nothing to do but to wait till they've—ah—'chawed up' I think you call it—the enemy and all that sort of thing, you know. Take a cigah."

Bill Yancey looked dubiously at the Briton, saying:

"Guess you're coddin', stranger. This air goin' to be a despt scrimmage, I reckon, from the sound of the firin'! Tain't no time fur coddin'. Look thar!"

As he spoke, over the swell came pouring a host of cavalry in green coats, with brazen helmets, driving back the handful of Rangers. There seemed to be at least two or three hundred of the Mexicans.

In a moment Winfield's troop broke into a gallop and charged with a wild yell, firing as they went. The Mexicans

halted in a confused mob, and recoiled over the hill in disorder, while the advance of the Texans fell back on their main body with a defiant yell.

Yancey waved his rifle over his head and echoed the cry.

"Hooroar fur Texas, stranger! We're the boys kin chaw them up."

Mr. Smith puffed away.

"My deah Mr. Yancey," he presently observed, "that was vewy nice, 'pon my soul. Won't you take a cigah?"

Yancey silently extended his hand and took it.

"You air a cool hand, stranger," he remarked.

"Ah, yaas, why shouldn't I be, Mr. Yancey? You see it's not my affair. It's like going to the opewa, you know. I've paid for my place."

Yancey grinned, as he said:

"You hev a front seat stranger. That's so."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SKIRMISH.

THE whole body of the Rangers, in open skirmishing order, was now falling slowly back toward the little camp, followed at a respectful distance by the Mexican cavalry, which outnumbered them at least three to one.

The Texans had ceased firing, and a few of them were to be seen binding up their wounds, more or less severe, as they rode leisurely back to camp.

The two little buglers were very silent as they saw their friends coming in followed by the foe. Presently, François pulled the Englishman's sleeve, and whispered:

"Please—is there any danger, do you think?"

"Not the least, I assuah you," returned Smith, hastily. "Don't be alarmed, I beg. No one shall hurt you, 'pon honor, while I'm alive."

His tone was remarkably gentle and courteous.

Bill Yancey, on the other hand, growled out:

"Thunder and blazes, boys, don't you git skeered; 'cause we kurn't git ye home to your mammies—not muchually. Keep a stiff upper lip, and you'll soon see some tall fightin', I'll bet. The darned Greasers is gwine to try a rush. See 'em gittin' together."

In fact, at that moment, the Mexicans, who had been riding to and fro in confused groups, suddenly developed themselves into four heavy squadrons, and forming line, prepared to charge.

Two of these squadrons seemed to be composed of lancers, the others of dragoons, and it was the lancers that slowly advanced at a walk, which rapidly increased to a round trot.

There is something so imposing in the advance of a line of cavalry, that the people within the breastwork became quite silent, as the compact body of horsemen trotted forward with waving pennons.

A gallant sight it was to see the Mexicans ride forward, and the scattered rank of Texans seemed as if it must be crumbled to fragments under the rush of the squadrons.

But, just as the lancers came within range, Jake Rhett's long rifle was seen to flash, and a line of puffs of white smoke appeared in front of the cool, self-possessed Texans, followed by the rattle of a volley.

The effect was immediate, as a large gap opened in the Mexican ranks, and men and horses tumbled over each other in confusion. The flanks separated by this gap of death, crumbled into fragments and fled in disorder, while the Texans slowly pursued their retreat to the camp.

A moment later, Charlton dashed up, with a bloody bandage on his left arm, saying hurriedly:

"Saddle and pack, sergeant. There's a whole brigade coming up. We must retreat on San Antonio. The rest of the battalion will join us when they hear the firing."

"All right, lieutenant," said the giant, "I'm agreeable. Come, Mr. Britisher, this hyar's gittin' to be fun, I reckon."

Mr. Smith rose from his seat with a sigh.

"My deah Chawlton," he drawled, "couldn't you keep those fellows back a little longah, till I'd finished my cigah? I hate to smoke, widin'."

Charlton threw back his long curls impatiently.

"A truce to banter, sir. We have desperate work before us. I think it might be in better taste, if you were to aid us, being an able-bodied man, and a good shot."

Mr. Smith yawned.

"My deah fellow, I've seen that sort of thing twied, and 'pon my soul it's vewy discomposing to the collab, you know. Besides, a bargain's a bargain, you know, and it was expwessly stipulated—"

"I know," said Charlton, angrily. "Very well, if you think your present position worthy of a brave man, retain it. Good-day, sir. Yancey, hurry up with the packs."

So saying he rode back to the skirmish line with an air of angry contempt.

Mr. Smith looked round at the boys with a placid smile. Francois was looking at him with blazing eyes. Auguste, on the other hand, pale as death, was watching Charlton with dilated eyes.

Francois came close to the Englishman, hissing out:

"You see, sir, what brave men think of you. Now, *Pu* shame you, too." He plucked at Auguste's sleeve.

"Come," he said, hoarsely, "when they peril their lives for a thing like that, it's time we played the man. I am going out. I can stop a bullet as well as any one."

Auguste, as if spellbound, silently followed his brother's example, and the two lads mounted and rode out of camp, just as Yancey and his men were packing the last mule.

Mr. Smith, left alone, laughed to himself. Antonio brought up his horse, and he slowly swung into the saddle. Then the little train of pack-mules, escorted by Yancey and his guard, moved leisurely off to the rear, just as the retreating line of Rangers came up to it.

Mr. Smith halted his horse as the skirmish line passed him, drew his field-glass from its case, and deliberately inspected the enemy. A second line was to be seen coming over the swell, and as they looked, a bustle and movement was observable in the midst of it.

Captain Winfield, who was some way behind the skirmish line, passed the eccentric Briton at a walk.

"You'd better get to the rear, sir," he remarked, gruffly. "I can't insure your safety if you expose yourself."

"Thanks, my deah captain," said Smith, blandly. "Would you be so kind as to tell me if you have any artillewy with Major Gweer's fellahs?"

"No," said the other, somewhat surprised.

"Ah, thanks. And how far off is Gweer?"

"About an hour's ride. Why?"

"Well, my deah captain, you see, I don't pwetend to know much about this sort of thing, you know, but it stwikes me hose Mexican fellows are putting two bwass guns into battewy on the swell yondah."

Winfield started, and took the glass the other handed him.

"By Heavens, it's true!" he ejaculated. "We shall have to run for it."

"Not necessawily," replied Smith, tranquilly. "Of course I don't know much about this sort of thing, you know, but it seems to me, I'd make a dash and take the battewy."

Winfield started and looked at the other earnestly.

"See here, Smith," he said, gravely. "You're not what you seem. Tell me, on your word as a gentleman, have you ever served?"

"My deah captain, what an absurd question, I'm suah. Do I look as if I had? 'Pon my life, you amuse me."

"You don't deny it," said Winfield, shrewdly. "Tell me seriously, do you advise me to charge the battery?"

Bom! Bom!

Two white clouds of smoke, two red flashes on the distant swell and a couple of round shot went ricochetting over the prairie, well to the left of the Texans. Smith watched them keenly, then turned to Winfield:

"My deah captain, I don't know much about this sort of thing, of course, but I should say, if those fellahs can't shoc bettah than that, your fellahs might take the guns."

"How far do you think they are?" queried Winfield, sharply.

"My deah fellow, how can I tell? Pwobably seven hundred yards, from the first gwaze of those shot."

"Mr. Smith," said Winfield, steadily; "you can't fool me. You're an old hand, and I'm a green one. Will you head a charge to take the guns?"

Mr. Smith laughed aloud.

"My deah captain, what an ideah! Didn't you agwee to see me safe through Texas, and show me all the fights and that sort of thing, you know?"

"I know it. I ask you this as a favor, Mr. Smith."

"Oh, my deah fellow, I assuah you, I shall be delighted, if it will give you any pleasuah, and that sort of thing, but I assuah you, I don't pwetend to know."

"Enough said—you consent?"

Mr. Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"My deah fellow—certainly if you wish it."

The retreating line of Rangers had halted when they noticed their leader in the rear, and Winfield called out:

"Rangers, about! Prepare to charge!"

A rousing yell was the answer of the Texans, and Winfield, continued:

"Boys, this gentleman has fooled us long enough. He may be a dandy, but he's an old soldier, who's seen more service than any one here. He has just advised me to charge the Mexicans and take their battery. Are you game to try it?"

The Texans yelled again.

"Now, boys," continued the captain, "will you follow the lead of this same gentleman, if he heads the charge?"

There was a louder yell than ever, and Bill Yancey roared:

"Ef I don't I'm a biled skunk, Cap. Let's see what stuff that ere Britisher's made of."

Mr. Smith laughed. For the first time he entirely shook off all the apathy and languor of his manner and looked the man he really was.

"Would you be so good, one of you, as to tell my servant to bring me a sword out of my baggage?" he called out, and as he spoke he began to throw off his coat and vest. "If you wish me to lead you, I'll do it with 'pleasuah, I assuah you; but you must obey ordabs, you know."

There were confused cries of assent, as Antonio rode out, carrying a long, straight cavalry-saber in his hand, and received his master's clothes and hat with perfect composure.

Mr. Smith tied a white handkerchief round his head, drew the sword and handed the scabbard to Antonio, saying:

"Antonio, you wascal, if a thing's gone, I'll skin you alive, you know, and all that sort of thing."

Then he turned to the Rangers and spoke in a different tone, sharp and quick:

"Men, I've not much to say. I'm a man of my word, and I want you to *follow* me, not *race with me*. If a man gets in front of me, I'll cut his head open. It's one thing to charge, another to rally. Youngster, give me that bugle. You're not wanted here. When you hear me sound the rally, I want you to come in at once. If not, woe be unto you. Sling your rifles, and draw pistols and knives. Don't fire a shot till you can touch their horses' heads. Spread out, and ride for the flanks of the battery. Now forward, trot, march!"

And away went the Rangers!

CHAPTER XIII.

HOT WORK.

It does not require long for men in action to take the measure of a leader. Battle-smoke clears the mental vision, if it obscures the bodily sense. The wildest Ranger in the troop did not venture to ride in front of the eccentric Englishman, who trotted away ahead, in his shirt-sleeves, carrying the long broadsword at a slope on his shoulder.

Mr. Smith's coolness was calming in its effect on the excitable Texans, who, left to themselves, would have been at full speed from the start. Their leader seemed only anxious to restrain their ardor, frequently glancing back and waving his sword sternly to either flank, as the impatient men began to creep ahead.

"Spread out there, men! Don't pass the guide! Keep dressed!"

In a cold, measured tone, he gave his orders, as if on a parade, and every one obeyed. Captain Winfield set them the example, and assisted to restrain their ardor.

Sergeant Yancey, with his guard and pack-mules, without

any orders, followed close behind the center of the line, at a trot, as the safest place in the midst of the swarms of enemies that they were approaching. The two buglers, both very pale, rode behind Captain Winfield.

As the line of the Texans trotted steadily forward, the Mexicans began to exhibit symptoms of confusion. A rattling but harmless fusillade was opened from the small-arms of the dragoons and lancers at long range, the bullets whistling far overhead, in the usual style of fire from unsteady troops. Then the two guns opened, and two round shot went humming overhead, as wild as the rest.

"Never mind that, boys!" shouted Smith, cheerily. "They can't hit us now! Gallop—march!"

He sat down low in his saddle, waved his saber, and went away at a killing pace. The Rangers gave a yell as they followed. They were within three hundred yards of the battery.

The Mexicans could be seen in the smoke, working like madmen to reload, but their supports of cavalry were already in confusion, and going "threes about."

Now at last the Englishman evinced symptoms of excitement. Looking back, he waved his sword high in the air, and shouted:

"Now for it, Rangers! Charge!"

With a yell of wild ferocity, away raced every man, plying his spurs and shaking the rein. The Englishman was ahead of all, but Charlton and Will Winfield were nearly abreast, far to the right and left.

Like meteors falling from the sky, the wild Texans shot through the battery, rode over the artillerymen, and dashed pell-mell on the heavy squadrons of the enemy's cavalry in reserve.

Just as the Englishman cut at a Mexican officer, cleaving him to the teeth, the Rangers began firing with their revolvers, and in a moment more five hundred Mexicans were fleeing, in a panic-stricken herd, before the ferocious charge of one-fifth of their number.

The guns were silent, and nothing was heard but the incessant rattle of revolvers, as the Texans vengefully pursued their enemies, driving them back with terrible slaughter on the ad-

vancing squadrons of a heavy column of cavalry, that appeared, winding over the rolling prairie like a huge snake, at a distance of some half a mile.

Mr. Smith, as usual, was the first to recover his coolness.

His saber, dripping with blood, had already dispatched two victims, when he caught sight of the dark column of the enemy, coming up to support their routed advance.

Instantly, he drew off from the pursuit, set to his lips the bugle which he had snatched from Francois Chaumette, before beginning the charge, and blew the recall.

Then he turned his horse, and rode slowly back toward the captured guns, which he found deserted by friend and foe alike. The limbers were close to the guns, the horses shot in the traces as the Texans passed, and four or five artillerymen lay around the guns.

Beside the limbers, and looking on at the fight with apparent lethargy, was Auguste Chaumette, but Francois was nowhere to be seen.

The Englishman started as he recognized the boy, and hurriedly asked:

"Where's the other? What's the matter?"

Auguste turned half-stupidly toward him.

"I don't know, sir. Oh, have you seen Mr. Charlton?"

Smith looked around.

"He was beside me, a minute since. He's all right, I'm sure. Don't be afraid, my dear. But where is the other?"

Auguste interrupted him by a faint shriek that told the secret quicker than words, as the disguised girl pointed with trembling finger to the left of the field.

There was a little knot of Mexican lancers, who had crept round the flank of the party, and were now galloping toward the guns, in chase of the pretended Francois Chaumette, who was coming toward the Englishman, spurring frantically.

Mr. Smith, for the first time, seemed to lose his temper, as he turned his head and beheld that hardly a Ranger had obeyed the recall.

"By Jove, it's too bad!" he ejaculated. "Blow the recall, young lady, if you want to save your sister. Blow like blazes!"

Then he set the example, by making the prairie ring to the

notes of the recall, threw down the bugle, and dashed off full speed to meet the Mexicans.

Luckily for him, they were scattered, and only some half dozen in number.

As he went he flourished his saber, and commenced shouting and swearing like a madman. The quiet Mr. Smith had become transformed.

A moment later he passed the fugitive, and met the first of his pursuers. The Mexican gave a vicious thrust, which the Englishman parried with the ease of an accomplished swordsman, dealing a single level cut at the other's face as he passed.

The sword was sharp, and the impetus of both horses tremendous. The keen blade shore through flesh and bone like dough, and the Mexican fell back, *beheaded*.

With a savage curse Smith raced on, and the next horseman, with a face of deadly terror, wheeled round his horse to flee. That single cut of his terrible opponent had demoralized the lancer completely.

He turned too late, for the Briton was already on him, and dealt him another of those back handed slashes as he passed. Only one, but it was enough.

The cowardly rabble behind him turned and fled like hares, at the sight of their second comrade beheaded by the terrible English swordsman.

With a fierce laugh the eccentric Briton reined up, and rode back toward the guns, where he found the two buglers, trembling and crying. It needed no change of dress to confess the fact that they were girls. The fact was patent to the slowest observer.

Mr. Smith rode up and spoke kindly and courteously.

"Girls, I've kept your secret for you, but, by Jove, you won't do it yourselves, if you don't show more self-control. The men are coming back. Stop crying, and behave like boys, or they'll find it out in a minute. You'll be in a nice position, then."

In a moment both girls were drying their eyes hurriedly, and the dark one said.

"Oh, sir, please tell us what to do. We were fools ever to come here, but we thought—that is—we wanted—"

Smith waved his hand.

"Never mind, my deah. I don't want to know any thing about it. Jump off your horses and help me to load these guns. We're not through this business yet."

As he spoke, he dismounted, threw the bridle over one of the handles of a limber-box, hitched his horse, caught up a rammer, and tied it on one of the guns.

"Stand clear!" he cried, sharply. "By Jove, the cowardly cads have left the gun loaded. Let's try the other."

Examination proved that the other was in a similar condition, and Mr. Smith laughed aloud.

"By Jove, girls," he ejaculated, "now I'll show you a bit of fun. You, François—beg your pardon, young lady—but would you be as good as to run to that dead fellow out there, with the yellow pouch, and bring it to me, while I point the gun?"

Guided more by gesture than words, François, as we must still call her, for want of a better name, ran to a dead Mexican artilleryman, and cut away the large yellow leather pouch, full of primers, which he had worn, bringing it to Smith.

Meantime the Englishman was rapidly pointing the gun—a brass six-pounder—at the distant column of Mexican cavalry, which was seen slowly advancing.

Mr. Smith seemed to be delighted with his occupation, for he was humming a verse out of "Lucia" all the time, with an amused smile on his face, and as the disguised girl reached him, he stepped back, muttering:

"By Jove, that's a pwetty shot. Thank you, Miss—ah—would you be so kind as to give me a name to call you by?"

"Never mind," she whispered. "Call me a wretch; I deserve it."

"Ah, no, by Jove, I say, you know, couldn't think of it, you know. Don't be so deucedly cut up, young lady. There! Now stand to one side, please."

While he spoke, his attention was fixed on the gun, into which he had inserted a primer, with the dexterity of an old artilleryman.

Now he took the lanyard in his hand, stood off in the proper attitude and pulled the cord.

Bang went the gun, and Mr. Smith darted to one side to watch the course of the shot.

"Good shot, by Jove!" he cried, with delight, as a gap appeared in the Mexican column, which began to open out.

Quick as lightning he darted to the other gun, and repeated the operation. The second shot went humming on its way, and was again successful.

"Fresh cartridge, François," he cried, hastily. "Auguste, come here, and stop the vent, while I sponge. This way. Ram your thumb down over this little hole, and don't let a bubble of air in or out."

With quick docility, the girl obeyed, and Mr. Smith proceeded to reload both guns.

While he was hard at work, the Rangers began to straggle in, their horses blown and sweating profusely.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. SMITH UNMASKS.

MR. SMITH looked up and met the gaze of Captain Winfield.

"My dear captain," he drawled, in his old style, "I think your fellows are the greatest set of muffs I ever saw. They don't know a bugle-call, when they hear it, by Jove."

Charlton, who just then rode up, looking flushed and excited, answered him, somewhat sharply:

"We were pursuing the enemy, sir. That excuses a good deal."

Smith, for the second time that day, exhibited impatience.

"I tell you what it is, sir, if I commanded this troop, I'd put every officer under arrest for not coming in sooner. When you've seen a few years' service, you'll learn that one charge doesn't win a battle."

"No, nor staying in the rear, either," said Charlton, hotly. Smith turned white to the lips, but he merely said:

"We'll settle that matter when this is over, sir. Look yonder. Is the battle over yet, do you think?"

Charlton looked, and beheld a heavy line of cavalry developing in the Mexican front. Evidently they had come into a hornets' nest.

"Instead of squabbling with this gentleman, Mr. Charlton," said John Winfield, sternly, "if I were you, I'd help him with his guns. He's an older soldier than you or I, and I'll bet on it."

"Give me a dozen fellows that will obey orders, captain," said Smith, "and I'll engage to keep those Mexican fellows back for an hour to come."

"You shall have them," said Winfield, cordially. "Mr. Charlton, rally the rest of the men, and dismount them behind the guns. Where's Sergeant Rhett?"

"Hyar I be, Cap," squeaked the little orderly, coming up, with his face covered with blood. "Them ornary skunks guv me a clip with thar cheese-knives, but I reckon I wiped out four on 'em."

"Help Mr. Charlton rally and count off," said Winfield, briefly. "Where's my brother?"

Jake Rhett laughed heartily and pointed toward the Mexicans.

There, about half-way between the contending parties, could be seen a little group of Rangers, among whom the bulky form of Sergeant Yancey was conspicuous, while Will Winfield hovered round them and the object of their solicitude.

The latter was nothing else than the drove of pack-mules, carrying the effects of Mr. Smith and the scanty camp-furniture of the Ranger officers. It seemed that the eccentric animals had stampeded in the charge, and had been carried so close to the enemy that it was a question whether they would get back safe.

Bill Yancey and his guards, in their excitement, had joined in the charge, forgetting the mules, and now, with characteristic audacity, were trying to carry them off in the face of a whole brigade of Mexicans!

That the operation was risky, became evident.

The obstinate mules, lately so frantic, became lazy, and refused to be driven beyond a slow trot.

Moreover, the Mexicans, seeing the prize within their grasp, at that moment detached a whole squadron of lancers to swoop down on the men who composed the guard, including Will Winfield.

Mr. Smith retained his coolness.

"Where are my men, captain?" he asked.

"Hyar, cunnel!" "Hyar, Ginerál."

A dozen voices answered the question, and as many Rangers leaped down and ran to the guns.

"I've fired many a salute, cunnel," said Harrod, touching his hat to the Englishman, "and these are my boys. Give me number one."

"Take hold, then," said Smith, curtly. "Now, lads, sponge and ram. That's your sort! Winfield, your fellows are improving. Only stop that cursed eagerness of theirs, and they'll do. Ready there! I'll aim for you. Hand me a primer one of you."

Rapidly, and with remarkable silence, the guns were loaded. The boisterous Kentuckians steadied under the increasing danger.

Charlton already had his men in line, in rear of the guns, as Smith sung out:

"Ready! Fire!"

Both guns went off together, with the same accuracy of aim that had been displayed by the Englishman in his first essay.

The Mexican squadron had swerved to one side so as to head off the little convoy, and presented a fair mark, not three hundred yards off.

As the guns exploded, the peculiar whirring sound of a stand of grape was heard, and the Mexican squadron was rent in twain as by a thunderbolt.

When the smoke cleared away, they were seen flying in wild confusion, and a few minutes later, the mules trotted in between the guns, safe and sound.

Will Winfield took off his hat and wiped his face.

"Hot work, John," he remarked, with a grim smile. "I thought the old mules were gone, once, but I made up my mind that that thousand dollars of Mr. Smith's entitled him to a return of his property, if we all got killed in saving it. There's nothing lost, I believe."

Mr. Smith stepped forward.

"Mr. Winfield," he said, gravely, without his usual drawl, "you are a man of your word, and by Jove, sir, I honor you. I've played the fool with you gentlemen long enough. I found I could not hide my old-country accent, try as I would, and I admit that I have caricatured it, and perhaps needlessly offended many of you. Hereafter, I drop all that. You are brave men, and I should be a cad to refuse to share your perils. I am Colonel Medhurst, of the Royal Artillery, and if you will accept me as a volunteer, I shall esteem it an honor to serve with you; for, by Jove, Winfield, you're a trump."

Will Winfield leaned over and shook hands.

"I knew you," he said, quietly. "I've been in England, you know, and I heard of your gallantry in India. I recognized you by your portrait in the London *Illustrated News*."

Medhurst—as we must now call him—laughed.

"My dear fellow, never mind that. You forget that this battle's not over yet."

"Oh, it's all right," said Will, simply. "You see what stuff those Greasers are made of."

Captain Winfield here broke in.

"Colonel Medhurst, I've heard of you too. I said you were an old hand, and now I know it. Will you take command of this crowd?"

Medhurst smiled.

"Better not, captain. I'm a regular, you know, used to stiff discipline, and all that sort of thing. I'm afraid I couldn't manage these independent fellows of yours. Either I'd kill one or two, or they'd kill me. Keep your command. If I can help you by advice, command me."

Bill Yancey had been gazing, open-mouthed, at the speakers in this colloquy, taking in every word. Now he turned his horse and rode off to the Rangers in the rear of the battery, among whom a great commotion was soon visible, which finally broke out in a wild yell of delight.

Will Winfield laughed.

"You see the boys don't dislike you, after all, colonel. They'll obey orders now, you may depend. All our fellows want, is to know that a man is capable of leading them. Then they'll follow him to the grave, and the other side, if necessary."

Here Charlton rode up, hat in hand.

"Colonel Medhurst," said the generous Kentuckian, "I have just learned who you are. Permit me to apologize to you, sir, for my rude words just now. Will you forgive me?"

"My dear boy," said Medhurst, extending his hand, "you're young and hasty. Another time don't judge by appearance. I forgive you."

"Sir," continued Charlton, "the men want you to command them on this fight. Will you oblige us?"

"No," said Medhurst, firmly. "I'll advise your captain. Obey *him*, and you'll please *me*. One bad captain's better than two good ones, and your commander's a trump. Tell them that, if you like."

"Very good, sir," said Charlton respectfully, and he rode off.

"Now, Winfield," said the Englishman, in clear, business-like tones, "it's time we were getting out of this. Compliments are all very well, but I fancy we can't stop a brigade all day, with a single troop. How far off is Greer?"

"Not very far by this time," said the captain, thoughtfully. "He must have heard the guns."

"Then, if I were you, I'd send back a man, well mounted, to hurry him up."

"Will," said the captain, simply, "be off."

Will Winfield bowed, and was just about to start, when the Mexicans uttered a loud shout.

Every one involuntarily cast his eyes that way, and beheld a spectacle calculated to alarm even the audacious Rangers.

The whole brigade of Mexicans, formed in five dense bodies, was trotting forward to charge, as if resolved to be foiled no longer by the handful of Texans.

"Away, sir," said Medhurst, sharply to Will Winfield, assuming in the crisis the command he had just declined. "Ride like the wind, and tell Greer to gallop, if he wants to save us."

Then as Will Winfield dashed away, he turned to the captain, saying:

"Keep half your men in reserve by the guns. Charge their left flank with the rest. Don't spare. I'll keep the front."

Captain Winfield dashed off, and the artillery officer addressed himself at the task before him, with his usual rapid coolness.

The already loaded guns were pointed and fired, while the Texans worked like mad to reload.

The grape tore a gap through the Mexican lines, but still they came on. Their vast superiority in numbers gave them confidence.

Like lightning, the guns were loaded, pointed and fired a second time.

The Mexicans, faint-hearted in masses, slackened their pace to a slow trot, and the line wavered.

"Give it to them again, lads," cried Medhurst, cheerily. "There goes your captain. Load up."

As he spoke, half of the Rangers were seen to gallop out on the right, in open order, and bear down on the Mexican flank.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAST CHARGE.

FIFTY men charging two thousand, seems like madness, but it has been done before this, with success, in cavalry battles. At the sight of the Texans coming down on their flank, the whole Mexican line, already shaken by the artillery, wavered and halted, while the squadrons on the left tried to show a new front.

To be caught in the act of maneuvering is dangerous with the best troops. With the poorly drilled Mexicans it was fatal.

You might see the thin line of Texans hanging on the outskirts of the confused masses of horse, firing their revolvers with deadly coolness into the helpless mark afforded by their enemy, till, with a wild despairing cry, the whole mass broke and fled, carrying away the rest of the line in its panic, and rent by the rapid showers of grape-shot that came tearing through, with wonderful rapidity, from the guns worked by Medhurst.

"Sound the recall," said the Englishman, coolly, to François and Auguste. "This is all very well, you know, but the fun's not over yet."

The first notes of the recall were promptly obeyed this time, and Winfield galloped back.

"Go into support, yourself," said Medhurst, as the captain rode in. "Let Charlton charge next time. They'll come on again."

It was perfectly true.

Hardly had the blown and foaming horses of the Rangers been rallied in rear of the battery, when the Mexicans were seen to advance again.

"Now, Charlton," said the imperturbable artilleryman, "these fellows mean business at last. Keep your men in hand, and don't charge too far. See, they are forming in three lines."

Sure enough, the enemy were maneuvering so as to attack in three successive detachments, the first of which opened out in skirmishing order, spreading far to right and left, and closing in on all sides.

"Break their line first," said Medhurst, "and then roll it up. Don't ride fast. Make every shot tell. Now, sir!"

At the same moment, down came the enemy, full speed, yelling to keep their courage up.

Medhurst staid by his guns, watching Charlton.

He was not the man to waste grape on a skirmish line.

Away went Charlton at a slow canter, meeting the lancers. With remarkable courtesy the Mexicans opened right and left to let him pass, as his compact line came grimly down.

A moment later it swung round to the left, and swept down the scattered skirmish line, in a blaze of fire.

Wherever it went, the way opened.

But far to the right and left the result was different. The enemy, finding no one to oppose them there, came rushing down on all sides on the solitary battery and its handful of supporters.

Medhurst was as cool as ever.

"Sound the recall," he said to François. "Now, men, fight for your guns, when the blackguards get too thick. Don't waste any grape. There are more coming. Now for it."

He had mounted his horse again, sword in hand.

A moment later, in rushed the lancers, and a confused medley ensued for near a minute.

Sheltered by the guns and limbers, the Texan artillerymen fired with deadly aim with their revolvers; Winfield's platoon dashed in, and mingled in the medley; and finally Charlton came tearing back, to aid in the repulse.

The danger was now, for the first time, great. The second line of the enemy was coming on in a solid mass, and the Texans were outnumbered three to one, by the first.

Colorel Medhurst, with his long sword flashing to and fro, raged like a lion in the midst of the fight. The Texans yelled and cursed as they fired, then, with empty pistols, knives, and clubbed rifles, fought with deadly ferocity.

A tall Mexican officer, in brass cuirass and helmet, seemed to be the leader of the enemy, and, inspired by his example, the Mexicans fought with unusual courage.

Presently a loud scream pierced the air, different from the hoarse notes of the men, and two lancers were seen trying to carry off the little buglers as prisoners.

It was the signal for a savage rush of the Texans to that point; and amid a confusion of shouts, curses, and knife-thrusts, the disguised girls were rescued, and carried to the rear.

Then—how it was, no one could say—the hitherto desperate Texans suddenly became superhuman in their fighting, and the Mexicans, who had just displayed such unusual valor, took a sudden panic.

A moment later, they were flying in a dense mob, running into the second line, just as it was advancing.

As for the Texans, they were too weary to pursue.

Medhurst leaped down from his horse, pale and panting, and hastily pointed and fired one of the guns. Then was displayed the use of reserving the fire till that moment.

The demoralized Mexicans, torn by the shower of grape, just as they were beginning to rally, broke wildly through their second line, and galloped away.

"Load up, quick!" panted Medhurst.

He noticed that the second line had halted.

Bang went the other gun, a moment later.

"Oh, for one fresh squadron!" sighed the Englishman.
"If I wouldn't lay you gentlemen out! Load up, men!"

The first gun was reloaded and fired again.

"I thought so," muttered Medhurst. "After all, these fellows can't fight. Round shot, boys. They're going out of grape range."

It was true.

With singular unanimity the whole of the second line was going "threes about," and moving to the rear.

"Now, Captain Winfield," remarked the Englishman, coolly, "we can take a little rest. The cads are afraid to try it again."

He looked round for Winfield.

The captain was standing, with his arms folded, a little way to the rear, watching, with a grave and thoughtful look, a curious group.

Lieutenant Charlton, apparently dead, lay on the ground at the side of a limber, while over him, weeping and wringing her hands, knelt the girl who was only known in her disguise as the bugler, Auguste Chaumette.

The other girl was crouched on the ground, her face hidden in her hands, her long curls fallen over her face.

Medhurst saw in a moment that the secret was out, and with some little curiosity he moved back to the side of Winfield. As he did so, the old captain spoke in a stern tone.

"*Agatha York*, what made you deceive me thus?"

François—or Agatha, for the secret is out—only bowed her head still lower, and cowered down.

Medhurst gently touched Winfield's arm, whispering:

"Keep it quiet, old fellow. I've known it for several days."

Winfield turned incredulously.

"You! How did you find it out? Have I been the only blind man here?"

Medhurst drew him aside.

"Men are all easily blinded, old fellow," he said. "I thought they were boys, too."

"How did you find it out first?"

"Well, you see, by Jove, they were both uncommonly im

pudent to me, one day, and, thinking they were boys, I was going to—well—to give them a good hiding, you know. But, by Jove, when I caught hold of them, you know, there's no mistaking a girl for a boy, you know. The flesh is as soft as dough, you know, and I let them go in a hurry. By Jove, sir, I was never so astonished in my life. Do you know them?"

"Too well," said John Winfield, in a tone of deep mortification. "The mad young fools! One is Ella Moreland, daughter of my next door neighbor at home, and engaged to poor Charlton there, who, I fear, is killed. The other is my adopted child, Agatha York, who's to marry Will some day. What brought the hussies here, I wonder?"

Medhurst smoothed him down.

"Never mind asking that, just now. Danger's too near. How did you find them out?"

John Winfield made an impatient gesture.

"How could I help it, is the only wonder. I knew something in both their faces, but they've stained their skins, and have their hair dressed so different, that they fooled me. And then, how the deuce should I connect two Creole boys with girls I fancied home in old Kentucky? Let me once get out of this scrape, and I'll take care to get them back home in quick time."

Medhurst looked thoughtful.

"The little one seems like to break her heart over Charlton."

John Winfield started.

"Right. I'm a brute to be scolding her. God send that Greer comes up in time."

As he spoke, Ella Moreland uttered a sudden scream of joy.

Charlton had opened his eyes and was stirring.

"Oh, Charley, Charley," ejaculated the girl, "only live to forgive me, and I'll never play spy on you again, dearest. Don't die, Charley!"

Winfield whistled.

"So that's what brought them down, is it?" he muttered.

Then he walked over to Agatha, and touched her shoulder.

"Come here, child," he whispered, not unkindly. "I want to talk to you, and find out what brought you here."

Agatha York rose and followed, with a look of deep mortification, mingled with sullenness, on her pretty face.

John Winfield led her out of hearing, for the Mexicans were all quiet at last.

CHAPTER XVI.

DISCOVERIES.

"AGATHA," said the old captain, "why didn't you let me know you were coming with us?"

"Because you wouldn't have let me come," she answered, blushing deeply.

"Does my wife know you're here?"

Agatha hung her head.

"No, sir."

The answer was almost inaudible.

"And you mean to say that you've left her in anxiety? Agatha, this was very cruel."

Agatha looked up, with a flash of her old spirit.

"No, uncle John, I'm not as bad as that. She thinks Ella and I are on a visit to Madame Chaumette, in New Orleans."

"And who is Madame Chaumette?"

"A friend of Ella's mother. We were at her house."

"How did you come down the river?"

"In the same boat as you, sir."

John Winfield stared.

"Look here, Agatha," he said, quietly, "tell me all about it. What made you come, in the first place?"

Agatha began to cry.

"At first only for fun. We wanted to see you off. And then Ella and I noticed Will and Charley Charlton flirting with all the nice girls on the boat, and we got mad, and made up our minds they should find we were as smart as they were. It was I who first proposed enlisting to be near them and watch them; and Ella, she was afraid. And then

we got to New Orleans and went to Madame Chaumette's, and she helped us, for a frolic, and we went to a hotel, and got our dresses, and then we had spent all our money, and couldn't go back if we wanted to—and so—and so—we thought ourselves safest with you, sir—and—oh, uncle John, won't you forgive me? I'm so sorry."

Here she broke down, sobbing.

John Winfield looked at her with a quizzical grin. Then he glanced over at Ella and Charlton.

The latter was sitting up by the limber, rubbing his head, and looking bewildered.

It seemed that a shot had grazed his skull and stunned him, without doing any serious damage, and in his half-dazed state he was confronted by the amazing fact that Ella Moreland was beside him, and incoherently asking for his forgiveness for something or other, he could not yet tell what.

"Look here, Aggy," said John Winfield, gravely; "you and Ella have got yourselves in a pretty scrape by your mad-cap pranks. The men all know who you are, by this time."

Agatha blushed scarlet, then looked timidly around.

The Rangers, lately so full of fury, were now standing by their horses, a little way off, quiet and observant, but in perfect order. Several dead bodies lay on the ground, in the Ranger dress, and the wounded were numerous.

As soon as she looked that way, there was a low buzz among the hardy Texans. It was evident that they comprehended the scene.

John Winfield saved her from speaking.

"Never mind, my dear," he said, kindly; "it's time we did something. You're punished enough."

Then he left her, and went forward toward the men, who stopped whispering, as the veteran drew near.

"Men," said John Winfield, quietly, "I've made a discovery. Our two buglers are my niece and adopted daughter, and her nearest friend. Being about to be married to my brother Will and Mr. Charlton, they have risked their lives to be near the men they love. Is there a man here has any thing to say against it?"

Bill Yancey stepped to the front and saluted respectfully.

"Please, Cap," said the rough borderer, "we boys hev

jest be'n holdin' a powwow, and we want to say, sir, that ef the darned Greasers wants to hurt them little gals, as is so gritty, we'll let 'em cut us into mince-meat, afore they tech a ha'r of thar heads. That's all, Cap."

"Very good, boys," said John. "Remember the Kentuckians are all gentlemen, and keep a guard on your tongues before the ladies."

"We'll try, sir," said Yancey.

Then Winfield turned away, and anxiously inspected the position of the Mexicans. In the excitement of the strange discovery he had made he had almost forgotten his enemy, and now, for the first time, he looked worn and troubled.

He had a treasure to guard that he had not before suspected.

The Mexicans were beginning to move again, but with no apparent immediate attack in prospect. They had divided into three bodies, and one was marching off in column, on each flank, at a trot.

Colonel Medhurst, all this time had not been idle. When the captain turned his gaze on the guns, he uttered a cry of surprise.

The dead horses had been removed from the limbers, and the Texans who acted as artillerymen were hard at work, harnessing up their own horses in place of the others.

Both guns were already limbered up, and as Winfield turned from his anxious scrutiny of the Mexicans, Medhurst called out:

"Cannoneers and drivers, mount!"

A moment later, he rode up to Winfield.

"My dear captain," said he, "there are times to fight and times to run. Our time has come to run. Your fellow are pretty well cut up, you know, and we can't expect miracles nowadays. As an old officer, my advice is to fall back on Greer, since he doesn't come to us. Look there."

As he spoke, he pointed to the distant horizon.

A dark moving mass of men was discernible, some miles away, slowly advancing toward them.

"It's my 'opinion," said Medhurst, quietly, "that we've stirred up their whole army, old fellow, and so there's no disgrace in running. We've done enough."

John Winfield nodded. It was self-evident.

Five minutes later, the little troop of Rangers, sadly diminished in numbers, but sullen and defiant as ever, took up their march toward San Antonio, carrying with them the captured guns.

Eleven corpses of their own number lay on the prairie behind them, and nearly twice that number of men, more or less wounded, rode slowly along in the column, with bloody bandages as mementoes of the late encounter.

The Mexicans, for a few moments, seemed to take no notice of the movement. At last, when they clearly comprehended that their obstinate foe was retreating, the sound of distant shouts was heard, and the three bodies into which they were divided were seen to quicken their pace.

Silent and grim, the Texans rode on, at a foot pace.

The columns on the right and the left were seen to creep ahead, gradually increasing their rate of march.

Then was seen a curious spectacle.

In the midst, tranquilly pressed on the handful of Anglo-Saxons, while three bodies of foes, each more than thrice as numerous, hovered round them in the form of an equilateral triangle, keeping carefully out of gunshot. Numerous as they were, the Mexicans had tasted too sharply of the quality of their stubborn foes to court a nearer approach.

Colonel Medhurst rode some distance in rear of the column, and every now and then he would halt and sweep the horizon with his glass. He began to look very serious.

He had seen a little group of black dots detach itself from the distant body that he took for the main army, and noticed that it was lessening the distance between itself and the closely following squadrons that he had handled so roughly.

With the glass, he resolved this group of dots into a full battery of artillery, the main body into a column of infantry.

Presently he rode up to Winfield and observed quietly :

"Captain, if I were you, I should trot."

Winfield started.

"Why? What's the matter?"

"There's a battery of artillery coming on at a round pace, said Medhurst; "and if they get within range, it may be troublesome,"

Winfield nodded, and then seemed absorbed in thought a moment.

Presently he asked :

"How long can artillery keep up a trot?"

"That depends on the horses. Not over half an hour without great distress."

"Very good," said the captain, calmly, "then we'll walk. I don't want to torture my wounded, till there's no help for it. Time to do that when they open fire."

Medhurst looked at the other and bowed.

"Captain Winfield," he said, "after all, you're a better soldier than I am. Nothing shakes your coolness."

"You see, I know all these men at home," said Winfield, simply. "We are all in God's hands, but I can't leave my wounded."

On marched the little troop at the same leisurely pace, the three bodies of Mexicans gradually closing in toward them, deceived by their quiet attitude.

At last it came to pass that the guns, which had been seen slowly gaining ground to the front, reached the body in rear of the Texans, and went into battery.

The flash and roar of six pieces was seen and heard almost simultaneously, and several six-pound shot came humming and bounding along over the prairie, and passed to either side of the Texan troop.

Winfield turned to Medhurst with a grim smile.

"You see we are in God's hands," he said. "He turns the bullets where he will."

Almost at the same minute, Ella Moreland, who was riding with Charlton in front, screamed out :

"Look, look! Friends at last!"

She pointed ahead, where a line of horsemen was seen, coming rapidly to meet them. It was Greer, with his battalion!

CHAPTER XVII.

GREER'S GRAND RUSH.

CAPTAIN WINFIELD reined in his horse and called out :

"Death's-Head Rangers, here come our friends. I think we've gone far enough on this track. If *you* do, let the wounded men ride on, and the rest of you halt. Mark me, I give no orders, for I want none but volunteers in this fight. Every man that wants to hold this ground, turn his horse and halt."

As if with one consent, every man in the column turned his horse round and halted in his tracks. Even the wounded men, hardly able to sit up as some were, turned with the rest.

The old captain smiled with proud satisfaction, but he shook his head.

"Here, boys, that won't do," he said. "I don't want the wounded men here. Sergeant Rhett, you've been hurt. Fall out of the ranks, and take the wounded to the rear with you. Major Greer will take care of you."

Little Jake touched his hat respectfully, but shook his head.

"That ain't nothen', Cap. I've hed wuss clips afore this. I ain't goin' to the rear till we've settled this biz. No, *sir*!"

There was a buzz of applause, and Winfield smiled again.

"That's all very well, boys," he said; "but somebody *must* take care of the wounded, and of *these ladies*. Some men are not fit to sit on horseback. Who will volunteer to take care of them?"

There was a silence.

Every man looked at his neighbor, as if unwilling to refuse, but still not relishing the job.

Colonel Medhurst settled the matter with his plain common sense.

"Look here, boys," he said, quietly. "Somebody must do this thing, for it's *un* fair to incumber your captain with his

wounded. I'm an outsider, and I propose that Mr. Charlton, who has received two wounds, take the wounded to the rear. We want none but sound men at the front. What do you say?"

There was a murmur of assent. Charlton, who was still weak and dizzy from his last wound, made no objection.

"Very well," said Winfield. "So be it. Mr. Charlton, I order you to take the wounded to the rear, and report to Major Greer."

"And that's po'try," quoth Bill Yancey.

Then everybody laughed, and the business was settled.

A few minutes later, the haggard troop of wounded filed off to the rear, taking with them the two girls, and Medhurst put his guns into battery.

It was done just in time.

The enemy's guns were beginning to fire again, and they were slowly getting the range.

Rapidly and steadily the Texans went into battery, the supports extending in open order on one side, and Medhurst deliberately trained both guns on the opposing battery before he fired.

"Good shot!" he exclaimed, exultingly, a moment later, as he keenly inspected the enemy through his glass.

"What's the matter?" asked Winfield.

"Dismounted a piece," said the colonel, gleefully. "Load up, men. They can't shoot, any more than a parcel of old women, over there."

Bom!

A flash and a white cloud in the distance, as a round shot came ricocheting along, bounding over the speaker's head and knocking a wheel off the limber, behind him.

Medhurst laughed.

"I told you so, boys. They can't see to hit a gun, and we shall not want that limber any more. Load up!"

Sergeant Harrod steps up, saluting, with a grave face.

"Only two more rounds left, colonel," he said.

Medhurst shrugged his shoulders. His coolness was inspiring.

"All we shall want, sergeant," he said. "The battalion will be up in five minutes."

As he spoke, a distant cheer was wafted toward them on the wind. The two columns of Mexicans, on either flank, were beginning to trot to the rear. One could distinguish the horses of the advancing rangers, by this time.

Medhurst turned to his guns, and pointed them with even more care than before.

"They used to call me the best shot at Sandhurst," he remarked to Winfield, as he sighted the last gun; "but I never tried as hard as I've done to-day."

Bang went the gun as he spoke, and Winfield watched the course of the shot with great interest.

They could track it by the showers of dirt, as it skipped over the level prairie, and a confusion was noticeable where it struck.

Medhurst looked through his glass.

"By Jove, Winfield, I say, you know, I don't want to brag, but just look through there, while I sight the other gun."

Winfield looked long and earnestly at the place indicated.

He could see that the artillery officer had made another almost incredible shot.

A second gun was disabled, the wheel smashed to pieces, the gun, with its muzzle buried in the grass, unfit for use.

Even while he was watching, Medhurst gave the signal to fire another gun. This time, the captain watched the shot.

As it struck, he uttered an exclamation of wonder, and put down the glass.

"Colonel Medhurst," he said, "I'll knock under to no mortal man with a rifle, but you can beat me all to pieces at this work. Boys, that makes the *third* gun he's dismounted."

The Texans raised a yell of delight, and Bill Yancey shouted.

"Stranger, I give in. I've hed a spite ag'in' ye, sence ye laid me aout on the boat, but darn my old grandmother's long-legged cat's left eyeball inter the mug of a Greaser corplar, ef you ain't a hull team and a hoss to spare, with a yaller dawg hitched under the tailboard of the waggin, when it comes to a square shot; and I can't say no fairer, kin I?"

Medhurst laughed good-naturedly, as his artillerymen rammed home the last round of ammunition.

"By Jove," he said to Winfield, in a low tone, "if I'd been

told a year ago, that I should be hail-fellow-well-met with these rough cads, you know, I wouldn't have believed it. Campaigning in Texas breaks up old habits, my dear fellow."

Then he turned to his guns for the last time, and took an aim more careful than ever.

His professional pride was fully roused, for he was among men with whom small-arm shooting was carried to the highest pitch of perfection, and it was something worth trouble to compel them to respect his prowess in a species of shooting far all others the most difficult. Just as he had trained his first gun to his own satisfaction, he heard the loud cheers of the relief battalion, close in the rear.

From the time of his first successful shot, the Mexicans had not answered with a single gun, seeming utterly demoralized.

As he fired, Greer's rangers dashed past the battery, full trot, and a great confusion appeared in the Mexican battery. The Englishman snatched up his glass, and discovered that his fourth shot had been as successful as the other three. A fourth gun was dismounted, and the enemy were limbering up the last two amid great confusion.

"Now, captain, take your turn," quoth the Englishman with his old affected air. "Science—and all that sort of thing, you know—is over for a time. Brute force does the business now."

He indicated, with a wave of his hand, the rushing squadrons of Greer's Rangers, who just then broke into a wild gallop and made for the retreating battery. As for the Mexicans, they were already going to the rear at full speed, flinching from the contact with a regiment of those terrible Rangers, who had made themselves so heavily felt, when a mere handful in numbers.

Not five minutes later, a triumphant yell in the advance, and the rapid rattle of revolvers, told that the Texans had struck the enemy. The struggle was short and decisive. Inside of five minutes' more, Major Greer, swinging a dripping saber in his hand, came galloping back to the little band that had just emerged from their baptism of blood, and called out:

"Gentlemen, it's all right. We've got the guns, and the boys are bringing them back. Hurrah for Texas!"

"Hurrah for Texas!" shouted the exultant Rangers.

"And General Sam Houston is within a day of us, boys," continued Greer, "and old Santy Anny's out yonder with all his fellows, and if we don't have a bully time, inside of a week, I'll shoot myself."

"Where's my brother Will, major?" asked Winfield, anxiously.

"Hugging a little bugler boy in the rear," quoth Greer, dryly. "He seems amazing fond of boys."

The eccentric major was happy at last. He was fighting "Greasers."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEDDING THAT WAS A WEDDING!

WE must shift the scene to a few months later, ere we close our tale.

The morning sun of Texas is just climbing the sky in the east, and the flowering prairie is vocal with the songs of birds.

Christmas day, and the thermometer stands at 75° in the shade at noon, while gold-winged orioles flit from bush to bush in the little island of timber on the prairie. There goes the flashing scarlet cardinal, like a live coal in hue, as he flits from branch to branch, and you may hear the sweet notes of the mocking bird, deep in the shadow of the motte. Tap! tap! tap! That's a woodpecker; and if you steal along carefully, you'll catch the little fellow at work on a decaying tree. Then you can hear the harsh screams of the quarrelsome blue jays, squabbling together in one corner of the wood, while the blackbird sits contentedly aloof, and whistles softly to himself about the nest he built last spring out in the North, and how he and his mate are going there next year, when the southern prairies are baking in the sun, and the northern snows are gone away.

Near by, in strange proximity, chatters a pair of brilliant green and scarlet parroquets, birds of the tropic, beside our

summer songsters, that roam to Canada. Truly Texas is a wonderful country for the lover of birds.

A sweet little wood is that prairie motte. The gigantic live oak, draped with its funereal vails of white Spanish moss, towers close to the spiky palmetto, short and sturdy, while the swift-growing cottonwood, the Osage orange, mulberry, cypress, and sycamore, are mingled with the ever present acacia, better known in Texas as the *mesquit*. There are walnuts and peaches growing wild, with wild vines climbing up their stems, and more than one fig tree.

At the edge of the motte, and out on the prairies the flowers are finer than in the best cultivated garden of the North, mimosas, wax-plants, gorgeous trumpet-flowers, lilies, geraniums, asters, cardinal flowers, great purple dahlias, all growing wild with a profusion astonishing. Clearly, Texas is a wonderful country to live in.

Scattered over the prairie, at intervals of a mile or two, these mottes stand as perfect preserves of song-birds, while a dark, sluggish stream, deep and black-looking, but clear to its bottom, winds to and fro, amid the level landscape, bordered with a heavy belt of woodland.

There you may hear at intervals, the low cluck of the wild turkey, answered by the distant gobble of the male, seeking a mate. Flocks of wild water-fowl go skimming over the stream, screaming their joy to each other at the pleasant quarters they have found. There you may see the great brown Canada goose, with black head, alongside of the brilliant summer duck, with its blue and green and gold wings, and snowy collar; little fat teal, fit to make one's mouth water, remembering their savory plumpness, swimming together with dozens of other species.

Further, in that marshy flat, the snipe are feeding, the plovers whistle on the prairie beyond, and the cranes and herons are wading through the shallows, or standing statue-like, waiting for passing fish. Hist! there goes a deer out of the long grass in the prairie, startled at the sudden flight of a rabbit going to its burrow, and the deer flushes, in its turn, a covey of pinnated grouse, gray and white spotted, while the squirrels sit up and chatter to each other about the crowd of strangers that have come that year.

Certainly, this corner of Texas is a paradise for game. So thinks yonder lithe spotted jaguar, creeping from bush to bush, stalking an unwary fallow deer. So think the wild-cats in the motte, pouncing on the hares and rabbits. So thinks the old black bear yonder, sitting on a dead tree, and licking his paws, undisturbed by the furious buzzing of the bees whose hive he has just robbed. So thinks the bald eagle, soaring majestically overhead, as he stoops on a wild goose for his breakfast. So thinks the graceful fork-tailed kite, with his snowy head and breast and ebony shoulders, as he clutches up the rattlesnake that has just gorged a squirrel, while a herd of peccaries, trotting stupidly ahead, snort their disgust when they find themselves robbed of their deadly enemy, the snake, whom they were about to devour.

And so thought the old fathers of the San Joaquin Mission, when they plumped their old building down by the little stream, two hundred years ago.

The mission fell to ruin long ago. The fathers left it, and it has passed into secular hands, many years since.

First a *haciendado*, with immense herds, made it his headquarters, but the Comanches "lifted" his stock and "raised his hair," and San Joaquin fell into bad odor, in Mexican times.

Lately, a different man had come to live there, since Texas passed forever out of Mexican control, at the famous day of San Jacinto, April 21st., 1836.

A tall, grim man, with an iron-gray beard, who spoke little and smiled seldom, while he kept the table in a roar with his dry stories. A man of Anglo-Saxon race, leathern-clad and followed by others, as rough and ready as himself.

Captain—now Colonel—John Winfield, of the "Death's-Head Rangers," whose last charge settled San Jacinto for Texas, has received a magnificent grant from the grateful State, rich in land if poor in money. He owns the whole of the old Mission of San Joaquin with its lands for fifteen miles in every direction round him, on the sole condition of keeping out the Comanches in his quarter, if he can. "And I reckon I can do that," says the stout captain dryly, as he looks back at the followers who have flocked to his Mission, and stand ready to defend him as long as he supports them.

John Winfield has sold the old Kentucky homestead, since he received his grant. "The old lady," like a good wife, took her husband's word, when he wrote to her to sell out and join him, for "she would be a queen."

She is now, to all intents, a petty queen.

The Mission buildings, built for five hundred monks, are ample for all Winfield's followers. The cloisters are all turned into stables, for horses unlimited, the black servants from Kentucky are quartered luxuriously and the old walls of the Mission have been repaired and put into defense, able to defy all the Comanches of the border.

This day there is a grand excitement at the old Mission.

There is to be a great wedding, and all the rancheros and old "San Jacinto men" are coming to the hospitable home of the Winfields, from twenty, thirty, ay fifty miles distant.

Will Winfield and Charley Charlton are to be married at last, to the two runaway girls, who played the boy so successfully as to cheat their own lovers, day after day.

And Will Winfield has just completed a statue, out in the wilderness, which is to be unveiled on the wedding-day, after the wedding sports. The little chapel of the Mission has been renovated, and Padre Domingo from Bexar is to perform the ceremony.

"I ain't much on religion," says Mr. William Yancey to Mr. Jacob Rhett, as the big man and the little one sit on a dead tree by the fish-pond, spitting in amicable concert into the water. "This here bowin' and crossin' and sich, I never seen the use ou. Give me a real old camp-meetin', when the minister gits right up on his hind legs and howls, and I'm *thar*. I've experienced religion, twice't, I hev. But it don't stick. It makes a feller quit chawing baccar and drinkin' whisky, and them's what I kurn't live without. So I say, let 'em hev their old priests in to splice 'em, ef they want. *I* goes for a *Justice*, fur all the wife biz *I* wants. But when it comes to the drinkin' the bride's health, you and I air *thar* every time—eb, old hoss?"

Mr. Rhett extracted his quid from his mouth in a reflective manner, then took aim at a tame heron that was slowly

mincing along close by, and struck the innocent bird full in the back with the quid, before he answered :

"Thar'll be some tall old fun to-day, you bet. Hark ! the orgin's a-playin' now. Thur comin' aout."

Bill Yancey jumped up, with great alacrity.

"Now fur sport, hoss. Let her rip," he cried.

Out of the little chapel came streaming a gallant company in every picturesque variety of dress, following the bridal party, four abreast.

Will Winfield, stalwart and bronzed, in the picturesque Ranger uniform of the "Death's-Heads," walked at the head, with pretty piquant Agatha, now Mrs. Winfield, on his arm. Side by side, and towering above him in his six feet of graceful symmetry, his chestnut curls shining in the sun, came Charlton, with timid blushing Ella on his arm.

John Winfield, in new uniform, splendid with gold, came next, leading a little dark Creole lady, whose vivacious manner and gay talk formed a great contrast to her solemn partner.

It was Madame Chaumette, the frolicsome little widow of New Orleans, whose discretion was so small that she had aided and abetted two mad-cap girls on a certain occasion, to a freak in boys' clothes."

Quiet, slender Mrs. Winfield walked beside her, leaning on the arm of a gentleman with very large straw-colored whiskers, whose elaborate scarlet uniform was blazing with gold.

Colonel Medhurst, R. A., at the close of his long furlough, was doing honor to the friends he had gained in far Texas.

There was Major Greer, quiet and rational since he had driven out the "Greasers;" there was a very distinguished General, who afterward became Governor of Texas; there was a Lieutenant James Harrod, (promoted for gallantry at San Jacinto) with his empty sleeve pinned with the "Lone Star of Texas;" there were Mexican cavaliers, Texan rancheros, Kentucky ladies, Creole ladies, dark-eyed señoritas from Bexar, all the country side come to the wedding, while a crowd of negroes came running from the cloisters, leading caparisoned horses, which reared aloft and pawed the air, in risky "horse-play."

Now there was mounting of ladies and cavaliers, all riding

one fashion, save the few Northern ladies, who preferred the feminine side-saddle, and then the whole party galloped out on the prairie, to see the sports.

Yancey and Rhett were mounted as soon as the rest, but took no part in the feats that followed.

Indeed, few but Texans and Mexicans could emulate such riding.

Men on horseback at full speed chased the wild grouse in coveys, running them hither and thither, till the frightened birds could fly no longer, then picking them from the ground as they passed at full speed, stooping from the saddle.

Then there was a lasso contest, in which a Mexican and a Texan engaged, one with a lasso, the other with a long cane lance, without point. The latter was Major Greer.

The Mexican dashed down at Greer, swinging his lasso, and the Texan, by the laws of the game, was compelled to flee, till one cast had been made. The Mexican gains on Greer, having the fastest horse, and comes within lasso distance.

One swing, and the rope goes curling through the air like a snake, the huge circular noose passing a moment over the fugitive's head, then settling with unerring aim over the rider's shoulders.

Just in the nick of time Greer throws up his bridle hand to his head, holding the bridle there, stretched taut, and the noose falls on it and slides back over his head, as the trained horse halts.

In a moment the Texan has turned, and is rushing at the Mexican, who in his turn is obliged to flee, gathering up his lasso as he runs, pursued by Greer.

By a great exertion the Mexican evades the lance, and succeeds in gathering up the coils for a fresh cast.

Then comes a circling round each other, Greer trying to reach the Mexican, the latter to keep a distance sufficient for a new cast. His swifter horse enables him to do it, and again the lasso flies.

Up goes the Texan's bridle-hand and lance, and again he evades the cast, but less fortunate than before, his lance is entangled. Then comes a headlong race, the Mexican striving

ing to keep the lasso taut, the Texan to reach his competitor.

The noose has caught the round cushioned head of the tilting lance, and it will be plucked out of its owner's hand, if he suffers himself to be outstripped.

Slowly he gains on the Mexican. His horse has most endurance, if not so swift at a burst.

At last, with a vigorous shove of his padded weapon he thrusts his antagonist from the saddle, and the walls of the Mission echo to the triumphant shouts of his comrades:

"Hurrah for Texas!"

Reader, our tale is finished. Ye who read this last chapter and wonder if there is any truth in its description, who have followed the fortunes of the "Death's-Heads," in their first campaign, know that the author has been careful, in every chapter, to keep well within the domain of well-attested fact, and that in the old Texas of '36, all and more wonderful things were seen and done, than we have recounted.

If you love Texas as I do we may journey there again some day. For the present what more can be asked, when we have wedded our heroine, made all happy, and closed in victory the career of the DEATH'S-HEAD RANGERS.

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